

52
The
Teaching of

WRITTEN

ENGLISH

By

P. GURPEY

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THE TEACHING OF
WRITTEN ENGLISH

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TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

TEACHING THE MOTHER TONGUE
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

The Teaching of WRITTEN ENGLISH

P. GURREY



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PREFACE

This book is addressed to teachers of the mother tongue everywhere ; for though only pupils and schools in England have been considered, and kept in mind throughout, the principles and methods set out here are widely applicable, and may perhaps be of interest and help to teachers in countries where English is not the mother tongue. It presents an English way of getting to work and of giving English pupils a training in language, but teachers of mother tongues in Africa and Asia, and perhaps even in America, might find points of interest in what is described here, if they were to compare it to their own teaching of their mother tongue, especially in those countries where an African or an Asiatic language is, or soon will be, the medium of instruction in primary and in secondary schools. There can be no doubt that teachers of the mother tongue at home and abroad have something to learn from the modern methods and skill of the best teachers of English in England ; and so I have tried to describe and present here in detail some of the best of their teaching, so that others can learn from it, as I have. Indeed, the contribution that many teachers of English have made, and that some are still making, is an important one ; but this has not been widely recognised so that all too often their excellent methods and sound theories have not been passed on.

I acknowledge with gratitude the help and criticism that I have received, especially from Miss P. E. Bartlett, Mrs. C. M. Darroch, Mr. J. H. Walsh and Mr. Walter Adams, M.B.E.

P. G.



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Chapter 1

THE NATURE OF THE ENQUIRY

The writer can only hope, by the devices of literary composition, to let his thoughts shine through his words without being intolerably disfigured.

SPEARMAN. *Creative Mind.*

The problem of "How can you teach anyone to write?" must have troubled the minds of innumerable teachers; and though when seeking solutions to the problem, they will have planned and tried many things; yet always, year after year, in teaching English, the doubt may intrude: "Can it *really* be done?" One way of arriving at a sound answer is to question one's theories and methods in a rather sceptical manner, and as if the problem were entirely new, so that one is not influenced by earlier and less mature decisions and opinions; and then, each time, to work out fresh solutions, always criticising them with the determination not to be put off by superficial prescriptions, and also not to be beguiled by the writings of others on the subject; for we must remind ourselves that "No formulas for thinking will save us mortals from mistakes in our imperfect apprehension of the matter to be thought about."¹ But when each solution has been tested by the further question: "Does that method *really* have much effect on a writer's use of language?" a still further problem may worry the mind: "What is language?—What is its essential nature?" The answering of this last question will force us to try to

¹ GEORGE ELIOT. *Daniel Deronda.*

penetrate into the mysteries of one medium of thought and expression ; it should also help us to relate the theory and practice of teaching written English to the root causes of linguistic activity—for activity and process it undoubtedly is, with deep and complex causes.¹ These causes will be found, of course, in the normal behaviour of human beings, in social customs, habits and conventions, and in the everyday affairs of life. But obviously in teaching it is all too easy to separate language from real life and from all the natural impulses of children ; though utterly wrong to do so. For the best language teaching must concern itself with the life of the pupil ; and we may remind ourselves that the activities of the pupil's imagination and the responses of his feelings are an important part of his real life. To some children these are much more real than many of the intellectual evolutions that they perform in school. Effective teaching, then, would have to make use of realities, of normal occurrences in the daily lives of the pupils, of events and happenings that they hear about, take part in, or read of in their stories. They would have to practise using language for many different purposes ; because the most important function of language is to carry out what we have wished, intended, imagined, hoped, rather than purely intellectual thought, for language in real life is strongly purposeful.

We find, too, that language is especially necessary for our growth and development ; and that our language habits affect, and are affected by, our normal mental and physical habits and behaviour, such as observation, perception, feeling, emotion, imagining. Unfortunately we find that language habits, just like other habits, may become stereotyped or almost automatic, and therefore not amenable to

¹ So, too, "Thinking is best understood if we remember it is an activity." JAMES WARD.

processes and influences that might bring about increased skill and ability. Furthermore the lazy sameness of the expressions and epithets that we use in everyday life will, if persisted in, produce rigidity in our attitudes towards people and happenings, and will lead to a fixed obstinacy of unadaptability, and thus to an inability to change in a constantly changing world. We see that the unvarying use of a limited vocabulary, with its inability to adapt itself to changing impressions and to an initial widening and sharpening of our conceptions and apprehensions, will damp down mental growth and deaden the more skilful, practical use of our imagination, and its creative power too, which depends for its strength and fruitfulness not only on the copiousness and vividness of our perceptive experience, but also on precise and appropriate expression.

But we find that among pupils, parents, writers of English 'courses,' and even among teachers (especially teachers of 'other subjects') the conception is still rife that it is the business of the teacher of English to teach grammar, *précis*, paraphrasing, essay-writing, without concerning himself with the mental development of his pupils, or with an increase of their skill in handling a medium of expression. It is thought that when the pupil has acquired enough ability in English to pass an examination, the teacher has achieved success. This conception, of course, is totally inadequate. It is the business of the teacher of English to give his pupils a training in the handling of language: a training that will enable them not only to think more clearly and more independently, and to use language more effectively, but also to *live* more fully and more keenly. 'Correctness' in using language will be needed; but it does not appear to be an urgent necessity for pupils of eleven and twelve, or even thirteen. We conclude, then,

that important as it is to teach the pupil to write and speak correctly, it is far more important to train him in the effective use of words and structures in thinking and expressing, and in all his responses to everything that he is aware of, or that assails him.

It is far more important because children need a training in the handling of language so that they can deal more skilfully with the situations in which they find themselves in their everyday lives. They need help so that they can use language more adequately and also with a growing confidence in themselves, not only at school, but in their homes, in their games, in social activities, shopping, travelling, meeting strangers, and in all work and play that is worth while. Good language training would enable them to make more genuine social contacts, to talk to adult acquaintances more freely, to strangers more naturally, and to their fellows more clearly and exactly, for "Mental life is practical through and through."¹ And improvement in children's command of language should improve their control of themselves, and of their feelings and emotions. Communication then would become more satisfying to a child, and the expression of his difficulties and stresses would become more natural to him, as well as easier, for it would be less self-conscious. This communication and expression would afford him some relief from doubts and anxieties, and also from the miseries and helpless angers that are so often more upsetting or oppressive to him than adults usually realise.

Besides all these things, which are concerned mainly with communication and the use of language when the child is in contact with others, there is the important part played by language when the child uses his mother tongue to explain, or describe *to himself* what he dimly or partially

¹ S. ALEXANDER. *Beauty and Other Forms of Value.*

apprehends, or what he is trying to understand with the help of language by thus revealing it to himself. He may, for instance, be 're-living' in imagination some ceremony or incident that he has experienced, going over it again in his mind (as we all so often do), and trying to catch the exact and full pleasure of some action (swimming, sleighing, galloping, swinging, switch-backing), or a feeling of excitement—that was pleasurable and probably therefore valuable to him. A happy use of language here will be of great value to him, for it will sharpen apprehension of the thing itself or of the event, and help him to memorize it in clear detail, and so enable him to 're-live' it with some vividness. Thus he can store up his knowledge of the event, and can use it as a touchstone in mastering and experiencing other events, and can also acquire clear conceptions and knowledge of similar events when he comes to read about them.

It follows therefore that the conventional school composition, and many of the vocabulary exercises that are commonly used now, do not go deep enough to have much effect in developing the linguistic powers of the child, for they have little or no relation to the child's real life, that is to say, to his reactions to everything that goes on around him and that he hears discussed. These things usually need expression in language, if they are of any value, by *him*; for they feed his mental life, his reasoning, his comprehension, his imagination; and they affect his feelings and emotions. Language teaching cannot neglect these inner mental activities of his with impunity.

It appears evident that we ought to give a great deal more careful thought to this problem of language teaching; that we ought to probe more deeply, and, in teaching, to attempt to engage more fully all the mental and physical activities of our pupils. It is clear, too, that a more thorough

search is urgently needed to ascertain the principles underlying both the process of learning to master language, and the proper procedure to foster and train a language skill, and to develop the linguistic expression of experience.

Most people no doubt would agree that the teaching of written English needs to be subjected to a critical scrutiny ; for it is evident that educational standards everywhere can be raised appreciably by improvement in the handling of language. For clarity of language indicates clarity of thought, and clarity of thought leads to certainty of comprehension, and certainty of comprehension leads to mastery of knowledge. Though we must always remember that it is " the will to know " that matters, for " The ultimate source of efficiency in observation, in memory, and in constructive thought is insatiable curiosity and the will to know." ¹

Experience shows that it is vitally necessary, and of the utmost practical importance in every branch of knowledge to obtain adequate control over the instrument by means of which we are enabled to express our ideas, and to render them intelligible and acceptable to other minds. This instrument is language, which therefore Professor Dewey calls the ' tool of tools.' Unless we learn to handle this tool, to use language aright, no stores of knowledge which we may accumulate will avail us anything. For they will not be transmissible, or will be transferred so imperfectly as to be ineffective. . . . Not only education, but human intercourse in general, suffers enormously from the widespread lack of skill in handling language. . . . We always need, therefore, a general education to give us a control of language, so that we become its masters and not its victims.

F. C. S. SCHILLER. *The Pragmatic Value of a Liberal Education.*

¹ C. A. MACE. *The Psychology of Study.*

Chapter 2

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

Socrates: "All the great arts require discussion and high speculation about the truths of nature, hence come loftiness of thought and completeness of execution."

• • *PLATO. Phaedrus.*

Language is a familiar and yet a strange thing: well-known sounds come from our mouths without our conscious framing of them; and these flowing, ever changing and repetitive noises will represent perhaps the most commonplace, or the most meticulous, or the most intimate of meanings. This subtle and mysterious relationship—external sound with inner meaning—forming a unity without any consciousness on our part of a dual entity: how is this unity of sensation and sense brought into being? Is the associating of sound and meaning an intuitive act, or is it merely an automatic reaction, built up through countless repetitions? There have been many theories to account for language, but few penetrate to the heart of this mystery. Everyone knows, of course, that the using of language brings into play some mechanical skills: so that the associating of sound and meaning, however mysterious and intuitive, soon becomes automatic. But we also know that mastery of this medium, language, even of its simplest technical resources, enables us to use it as an instrument for creative effort at all levels, and for all imaginative and spiritual experience, except the very highest and the deepest.

Those of us, however, who have to learn laboriously how to make the fullest use of this intractable but pliable instrument,

must be concerned to a certain extent with mechanical skill. We need considerable practice in order to gain some command of its technical resources, and we have to try to find out how these may be improved in order that a growing mastery of the medium may enable us to achieve all that we are capable of and attempt. That concern however will not have very satisfactory results unless, at the same time, we give attention to the expression of those finer and deeper thoughts, aspirations and feelings that come to us in our better moments. Increase of mechanical skill and growth in richness and maturity of thought and feeling must proceed together.

Obviously too it is useless to concern ourselves solely with the finished article—with the written word or the utterance *that has fulfilled its task*. It is evident that when we have the printed or written words before us, we are able to manipulate the formal symbols, and can examine, analyse and alter the meanings they express, and we can criticize the final result too. But when thought is in the very process of formation, and when out of a vague and shifting consciousness the sentence patterns are beginning to take shape and continuity, we must beware of attending merely to the mechanics and techniques of expression. Rather, we should try to attend solely to the dim idea that is just making itself felt in consciousness, or the hidden intention pressing with imperceptible but increasing insistence for fulfilment. But what should we concentrate on in order to clarify a muddle of ideas, or to make exact and sincere what was observed by convention or custom? Surely it will avail more to focus our attention on the birth and growth of the idea and intention that are slowly moving towards expression, rather than attend *exclusively* to the finished product! For when we are trying to express ourselves, we are trying, far more

often than we realize, to catch with our tentative wording imperfectly conceived knowledge and thought, or only half-born apprehensions. And yet, in the teaching of written English, more time and effort have always been spent on the finished piece of composition than on the early stages of the pupils' mental activities and on their conception-forming and formulating period.

It seems better therefore, when we wish to help others to acquire a mastery of language as a medium of expression, that we should concentrate our attention, not on the point when words are fully fledged and capable of successful flight, but on the period of growth, when our pupils are trying to find words which seem to them to express what they have in mind. Often, of course, the words that they are trying to find are just those which would help them to know exactly *what* they have in mind. Often for lack of a word children find difficulty in expressing themselves, that is why they need help at that early stage. And we must note particularly, the only help that is productive is patient questioning and sympathetic understanding, which will be the fruit of the teacher's exact and imaginative thinking.

In the early stages of such work we should often concern ourselves more with children's experience, especially with their physical experiences, than with the mechanics of language. And just as a child learns to talk, not *in vacuo*, but in the closest relation with physical experience, and "needs sense impressions and bodily activity to stimulate imaginative activity . . . (e.g. puts on a top-hat . . . and imitates the grown-ups)"¹; so in learning to master language and improve his expression, a child needs to talk about his experiences, especially his physical and his

¹ K. BÜHLER. *The Mental Development of the Child.*

imagined experiences. We note that the child's talk is a part of his total mental and physical reaction to an experience ; and we must remember, too, that what a child hears and repeats is a vital part of his physical experience ; for speech is both physical and mental. His command of language improves and increases with his absorbed attention to everything that goes on round him, and under the pressure of an inner necessity to understand, and to announce his observation, and also to display himself and his powers. The use of language, of course, is always incited by an urgency to satisfy various degrees and varieties of desire, intention, hope and purpose. So, again, it is evident that our concern, in teaching language, should be with these activities of mind, body and spirit, with the acts of attending, understanding, expressing, communicating and carrying out the impulses of the will, and with meditation and other forms of preparation for speech and action—and *therefore* with all the mental life which is co-partner with the shadow-imagery of words. To see the teaching of the mother tongue as so many pages of written (and corrected) ' essays ' and exercises, produced as a weekly task, is to misunderstand not only the teacher's work and responsibility, but the very nature of language and expression.

It is true that to attain a command of language is in part a matter of mastering a skill, and we know that many people learn to manipulate language in obedience to " The Rules," and so succeed in utilizing language for all their routine and immediate needs ; but much more is required if the medium of language is to provide an instrument for carrying out all the finer experiences of thought, imagination, feeling and understanding. So the view that acquiring a command of language is no more than acquiring a skill must be most emphatically denied. *That* view results from ignorance and

misunderstanding, and is the refuge of the cynic and the obstructionist.

But what precisely is 'a command of language'? It is difficult to know exactly what abilities and skills go to make up a mastery over language. Without careful thought, we might say that a command of language is related to vocabulary, to correctness of grammatical form, to appropriateness of diction, and to clarity of expression; but this is a mere recital of headings. A much more searching analysis of the subject is needed if we are to discover how we can help our pupils to achieve some control over their mother tongue. Indeed, it is possible, and perhaps likely, that the teaching of English has often not achieved all that it could have, simply because insufficient thought has been given to this search for the ingredients of the linguistic ability. What is needed is an attempt to view the various elements more strictly and to analyse them conscientiously; though the task is not as simple as one might imagine. A command of language is not merely a question of size of vocabulary, for copious words can spoil a passage of prose by their inappropriateness to the context. It is not merely a question of correctness of grammar, for flatness and vacuity may be concealed by absence of mistakes and by a logical neatness of syntax; and it is not merely a question of clearness of meaning, for repetitive, trite conversation, we all know, is usually only too clear. What more is wanted?

To begin with, language must be capable of playing a vital part in one's experience—whether physical, or exclusively intellectual and imaginative. A command of language requires the manipulation of an active and expressive vocabulary and of a diverse and adaptable sentence structure, combined with a logical and discriminating management of the relations of words, as the result of a

sense of the orderliness and inter-relatedness of thought, feeling and mental attitude.

Furthermore, command of language cannot be merely a supple manipulation of words and verbal structures, for it plays a purposeful part in experience, often for instance helping us (by making subtle things clear to us) to become aware of the valuable qualities of experience—such qualities, for instance, as certainty, distinctness, urgency, vividness. And this awareness of the quality of experience occurs, because, if we have a command of language, our words can receive the impress of the quality and definition of the experience, or of whatever is being expressed. The result is that the proportions, qualities, and the sharp outlines of the thought and imaginings become clearly perceptible to the quick and sensitive mind. A person without this command of language has a certain blindness to the qualities of words and especially to their appropriateness to the subject expressed.

We should perhaps examine the ingredients of this 'command of language' even more closely and thoroughly, for it is a subtly complex ability. First, we may be sure that vocabulary must be active, varied and differentiating ; and verbal structures must be at ready call. These too must be varied, easily subject to modification and extension, and malleable enough to be shaped and impressed by thought, feeling and intention. Furthermore, it is essential that the relationships of the meanings of the words in a sentence are precisely perceived and rationally controlled ; that is to say, controlled by the dominant thought and feeling of the context, by the intention of the writer, and by an awareness of the active life of words to form their own nexus of meanings, which may or may not be anticipated by—or acceptable to—the writer. These meanings, during the

process of writing, have to be moulded and combined so that they will control (and also signpost) the general direction of the thought and attitude in their part of the context. The mind of the reader, therefore, as it attends to the words in the writing or print, and as it copes with the meaning of each particular sentence, feels itself carried along from one logical position to another, and moving in a determined direction ; for instance, towards fuller conviction, or to a more complete understanding. The movement of the reader's thought will then be controlled by the writer's feeling for, and mode of apprehension of, his subject : it will be smooth or distinctly articulated, or swiftly flowing, according to the serenity or the urgency of the feeling ; and it may proceed with an orderliness of motion or a vivacity of structure, according to the force, or the calmness of the emotion, and according to the scope, range and multiplicity of the ideas.

The quality of a writer's thought and emotion will, of course, be determined by the nature and the quality of his experience that he is expressing in words, and the nature and quality of his experience will affect the shape, ' form ' and verbal structure of the thought and language. These two dominant and controlling factors in expression, the nature and the quality of the experience, have not received adequate recognition by those who have dealt with this subject. They are vital elements, and of significant importance whenever ' expression,' of any kind whatever and in any medium, rises above the level of ordinary routine and imitative convention.

But when we have said this, we have not finished : there is in addition a hidden determining factor—purpose. This is the true instigator of all expression, giving it its prime impulse. And this applies to all expression and every use

of language, as well as to every other activity that is not an automatic reaction ; for "it is the function of reason to order things to an end."¹

We should keep ever before our minds that a command of language is governed initially and pervasively by the needs and purposes of the writer ; it is purpose that forces his passive words to awake into activity, that dictates the structural pattern of his sentences, that even calls up specific grammatical forms to reveal his will—forcing an imperative or a ' must ' to the fore rather than an indicative, or if he wishes to persuade, a ' may ' instead of a ' should.' It is purpose that guides and directs the whole tenor and development of his thought and language.

This most vital and essential element in expression has suffered an unwarranted neglect at the hands of many writers on linguistic science. And the majority of the writers on the teaching of English (and other languages), and many teachers themselves, seem to have forgotten the deep-rooted strength of purpose in determining thought, diction, syntax, and indeed, every moment of linguistic expression. When we take account of it in teaching, and allow it to play its natural part in all forms of written and spoken composition, the increased quality and correctness of our pupils' writing and speech, fostered by the clearer and more definite focus it provides, are soon evident.

So we see now that the conception of a command of language that is proposed here includes vocabulary, the structural pattern of verbal expression, the relatedness of meanings in word and phrase and clause, the direction taken by the train of thought in a series of sentences, the vitality and significance of what is being expressed, and, finally, the underlying purpose impelling the writer to write.

¹ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS.

But, it may be argued, all this is far from school compositions and the weekly exercise in the mother tongue. So it may well appear, and if it is so, so much the worse for school compositions ; but actually the difference between what has been described and what a school child achieves is one of degree, not by any means one of kind. That is where the mistake is so often made, and children's language work is so isolated and simplified that it becomes a mere intelligence test—if indeed it was not already modelled on one. But we should remember that an intelligence test is made to test, and to find out something, it does not aim to give language training. Isolated and simplified language exercises may give practice in one language skill, or at most two ; but the use of language in everyday life is a complex activity, and such exercises cannot do much to develop a command of language. Educationists still do not seem to be sufficiently aware that “in much instruction the most painstaking efforts are made to present facts as separate isolated conceptions. This is precisely the method by which to make teaching unreal.”¹ So the theory put forward here is that in all forms of expression—in words, music, movement, plastic materials, line and space—the ingredients of the medium and the principles are the same for children as for the accomplished artist, though there is nearly always a very great difference in degree.

But as many educationists and writers of school ‘courses’ have put so much emphasis on vocabulary, we must consider this aspect of language more closely. From the evidence of the various exercises on vocabulary to be found in textbooks it is clear that insufficient thought has been given to this subject. The commonest form of exercise now in use seems to be the filling in of blank spaces left in a number of

¹ W. K. RICHMOND. *Education in England*.

sentences. This is a slight advance on the earlier type (also still current) that called for a differentiation of meanings of apparently similar words, such as 'continual' and 'continuous,' 'effective,' 'efficient' and 'efficacious'; but exercises of the missing-word type have very little relation to normal language activity; they are not founded on a sound conception of the part that words play in speech and writing. For a word out of its shell of context has no living function, and its pulpy, sprawling meaning is without a structural pattern of words that would give it a significant shape and purpose. Apparently it is very necessary to emphasize the fact that words do *not* play a solitary part in language, and that a thought cannot be born if words are dealt with as if they were counters or cards being shuffled, for "Language gives birth to conceptual thinking only when words are combined in a context" ¹ and "The meanings of words are made precise in actual use by the action of the context." ² So we see that words are links in a chain of thought and intention, each being connected by relationships of meaning to those nearest to it. But they are not linked merely to the preceding and the succeeding sentences, making a single line of thought; but, like the rings in chain-mail, they are interlocked to make a patterned fabric of meaning and purpose, and a complex weave fed by the variegated strands of subject and situation and from the whole area of the writer's experience which give rise to the expression in language.

All this is true, of course, when we are talking about *real* language: the language that is used in everyday speech, in

¹ STOUT. *Analytical Psychology*.

² J. Y. T. GREIG. *Language at Work*; see also: VENDRYES. *Language*, "Words are not arranged in the mind as isolated entities"; and "Isolated words are in fact only linguistic figments, the products of an advanced linguistic analysis." B. MALINOWSKI. *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*.

writing letters, in business, learning, in all social activities, and in all inner thought that makes use of words or of vestiges of words. We need not concern ourselves here with language on the dissecting table, when the sentence is broken down, and each word taken apart, and its meaning, origin, history or form examined and classified. Real words, that is to say, words being used in a real-life context, are not dead things: they are active members clothing thought, feeling and intention in this fabric of expression which is carrying out the purpose of a living mind. They have a teleological function, and this function enables expression, communication and consciousness, too, to be active and effective. And, by providing a 'form' for thought and intention to which our senses can respond, and a local habitation for what is to be expressed, words in contexts enable 'mind' both to know, and to know it knows

Thus, words have a prime part to play in helping the mind to grasp more clearly what it is *becoming* conscious of ; and in varying degrees they help the mind to apprehend *that* more objectively, thus providing the means for mental growth and material progress. This clarity of expression and partially objective apprehension are the means whereby competent thinking can take place ; and as active purposeful thinking feeds the life of the mind, and as the life of the mind is in its essence the core and fibre of personality, a growing mastery of language assists in the biological process of the growth and development of personality.

But it is evident that in the daily traffic of life we need an abundance of active words, and our word-hoard needs to be constantly replenished ; furthermore, our common store of words needs to be readily obedient to all the calls made upon it, and quickly responsive for all the immediacies and actualities of living, for these always make urgent

demands on our readiness with words. Not only is readiness in response with words a vital element in mental growth, but some skill with words often *guarantees* some efficiency in action, social behaviour and other modes of living, as, for instance, when we are suddenly called upon to speak in public. And one useful gift that skill with words can bestow is that of confidence in the face of immediate necessity for action, such as having to direct a stranger. This confidence, too, favours right and appropriate action, for the speaker does not then at one and the same time have to cope with choice of facts and of words, with the complications of immediate speech, and *also* with his own confusion of mind.

But not only do words carry out their actively pragmatic purpose in everyday routines and exchanges sanctioned by social custom ; they also have a deeper responsibility. They have to reveal and clarify our more transcendent conceptions and finer ideals. Words, too, can often give immanence, form and individuality to all the creatures and creations of our imaginations. Their function also is to round off our experience, past or present, and to bring it to fuller fruition, and possibly to some more communicable excellence of form, so that our best can be sealed triumphantly in fitting words, and thus achieve a satisfaction and a newly-found fulfilment.

Therefore we may remind ourselves that the words we make use of in the daily exchange of our social affairs and business—that we roughly make do with—may be put to finer use and in more shapely form for the subtler purposes of our finer perceptions, feelings and conceptions. In the one case, the word is but ‘small change,’ its duty being to act as “the tag, or handle, of a whole behaviour complex

in social and personal adjustments.”¹ But in the other, words become completely integrated afresh in the mind : at the dictates of experience they become completely expressive of it, and are thus generally identified with experience. Here “they become central in the organization of memories and the anticipations of future events”² and they are thus felt to be a complete mode of experience themselves.

. . . these precious coffers which jealously preserve all the infinite objects of nature in those multiple and varied classifications within which human toil and intelligence, ceaselessly testing and re-testing, have little by little come to group them, according to the interests and the ends, technical as much as scientific, of man.

E. RIGNANO. *The Psychology of Reasoning.*

¹ F. LORIMER. *The Growth of Reason.*

² *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE PUPIL'S VOCABULARY

To see a word for the first time . . . in a connection where we care about knowing its complete meaning, is the way to vivify its meaning.

GEORGE ELIOT. *Leaves from a Note-Book.*

We have insisted that words that are isolated from thought, real experience, or from some other context which has at least some brief continuity and some significance, are useless, for they are ineffective. Nevertheless part of a composition course should include language work which will promote the learning of new words, and which should also bring into more active and effective use words already acquired, for it is necessary to build up a sound workable vocabulary. So in teaching we may aim at the enlargement of our pupil's vocabulary ; though not simply giving out lists of words to be learnt, or asking for unusual synonyms to be found. If new words are to be more than an array of specimens, it is essential to devise ways of getting them *worked into* each pupil's thinking habits and mental experience. This we can do by making these new words help in some significant work in a conversation, a story, a description, etc. Learning lists of words is unfruitful, and even more ineffective than practising each new word in isolated sentences. A few new words may be learnt in this way, but the exercise does not give a good return for the expenditure of time, and the words will still have to be used freely before they become part of a readily available vocabulary.

Those who have taught foreign students know that a plethora of words does not necessarily indicate a good

command of language ; in fact, the contrary is often true. Not that many English children ever reach a stage when they are in danger of mere verbalism. Nevertheless, we should always check a superficial use of those words that are rich in meaning.

The real sources which give sap and impulse to improvement in the handling of language are deep-rooted ; they spring from precise and delicate responses of the *senses*, worked upon by vivifying and transforming activities of the imagination. But most people in the educational world (except those who understand the teaching of infants) do not unreservedly believe Aristotle when he said : " Nothing can be in the intellect that was not first in the senses," nor are they influenced by Locke's re-affirmation of that truth and by his explanation of its relevance to growth of mind and to education ; for acceptance of a theory without the application of it in practice is not really belief, it is merely verbal assent. It is necessary, therefore, to emphasize that such things as differences in shades of colour, in shapes, in movements and the forms of things and events, perceived by the senses and distinctly held in mind, are subtle distinctions of *fact*. For instance, the sudden, dart-like flight of a dragon-fly is a distinctive fact, different from the suspended animation of small gnats " borne aloft or sinking as the light wind lives or dies," but differences noted in the life-histories of dragon-flies and gnats may be merely verbal unless the senses have played their precise part in the ' knowing.' Distinctions of fact are the very core of distinctions of meaning ; and for distinctions of meaning we must (usually) have words, if these distinctions are to live in our minds and be used in thinking and in communicating, or in some other form of expression. But it is the *senses* that give precision to fact.

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The decisive impact of real things and events on the pupil's mind, therefore, has an essential bearing on his language reactions and on his language learning. When things and his language are in close relation, his language reactions will be comparatively permanent ; his language then will express his personality, as we vaguely say ; they will be his own, not so much discovered by him, as brought into being by the sole effort of his mental powers stimulated by the activity of his senses. For this effect to take place, it is essential for the pupil's attention to be sharply focused on some scene, or on some *thing*, so that the exact and individual qualities and features of the scene or thing stand out from their background with spot-light clarity, and so make their decisive impact, and vividly reveal their individuality. If attention, however, is partial or superficial, the maturing power of the experience and its fermenting effect on ' expression ' will not work. Care, therefore, must be given in helping the pupil to concentrate. This may be done (as described later) by questioning, by acknowledging the effect of the pupil's words on oneself, by giving just as much attention to stumbling attempts as to successful ones, and by giving the pupil practice in making use of criteria to test his efforts to achieve exactness or vividness or some other quality. Finally we need to see this kind of work as training in expression. The value of such training to develop the innate powers of thought has been emphasized by many educationists ; for instance, George Sampson wrote : " The effort to secure clearness of expression is a great step towards clearness of thought,"¹ and O'Shea pointed out : " We can encourage orderly, related thinking by demanding orderly, related expression."²

We should also remember that development of the pupil's

¹ *English for the English.*

² *Linguistic Development and Education.*

language goes hand in hand with the growth of his powers of apprehension ; though only too often help must be given to both language and apprehension so that the awakening interest may not flag or be dissipated. The stimulus for the pupils to observe and record the impressions that strike them in the things around them should be active on every occasion possible.

- The recording of impressions should not, however, be made prominent in the study of literature in schools, as is ~~Sometimes~~ done, for literature will make its full contribution to the pupils' apprehension and response to language if proper attention is given to the fineness and completeness of the meanings of great literature ; and it can make its effect in their writing without attention being drawn to the skill in expression of the authors they are reading. Those pupils who are quicker in response will become aware of the sharper outline or shade of colour, and of similar distinctions and precision without being fully conscious of the cause. And when this happens frequently, as we wish it to, or even occasionally provided it is with some vividness, those pupils will begin to use words that they meet in their reading, and some of them will use these words with adroitness and effect.

The growth of children's mastery of their mother tongue seems to have received little attention from the majority of the writers on learning and teaching languages ; these seem to have concentrated so much on the mastering of the linguistic symbols that they have neglected the things and the experience symbolized. So, too, the true nature of ' meaning ' seems to have eluded many, we might therefore condense the matter into one short statement : differentiation in the meanings of words is the result of differentiation of contexts. ' Context ' here refers to the real world, so

that we must be concerned with the child's relation to that world, which means more to a child than any literary context, except to the specially gifted child.

In the carrying-on of human affairs and in the general business of living, 'meaning' has to be related to the external world either closely with the help of the senses, or 'once-removed' in expression, where it has had the co-operation of intellect and imagination ; for it is only the external world that gives distinct significance to language : as Roger Fry said : " ' Meaning ' is the completed contact that intellect makes with things, just as sensation is the completed contact that the senses make with things." And in return, to know if words are true or precise or important or useful, we have to relate them to the world around us.¹ Moreover : " No operation or affair may be perfect, nor no science or art may be complete, except experience be thereunto added, whereby knowledge is ratified, and (as I might say) consolidate." ²

So the context of words and meanings for the pupil learning to achieve a mastery of his mother tongue is a context of a real-life situation, or of an imagined real-life situation. The corollary to this, we note, is that for meanings (and contexts) to strike home, that is to say, for meanings to be *known* with clear outlines and prominent features so that they can be retained and 'consolidated,' and so also that they can be active and readily operative in the mind, contexts must be vital. Words and meanings and thoughts are made vital and exact in the welter and turmoil of our very busy and unstable consciousness only by vital and vivifying contexts, and of course by emotional stimulus. By vital

¹ See further on this point : F. C. S. SCHILLER. *Studies in Humanism*.

² Sir THOMAS ELYOT. *The Governour*. Book III.

here we mean vital in themselves and vital to ourselves. Consequently such contexts as are supplied by stories, plays, diaries, autobiographies are needed in schools to give vitality to meanings—they are not merely to supply attractive reading or to entice the reluctant reader.

Another fundamental principle, also often ignored, is that enrichment of idea goes hand in hand with enrichment of vocabulary. Enrichment of idea includes new knowledge, new aspects of known experience, new ways of thinking, new modes of behaving, new conceptions of things—real or imaginary. What Malinowski said about language in primitive societies is emphatically true in our own society: "The mastery over reality, both technical and social, grows side by side with the knowledge of how to use words. Whether you watch apprenticeship in some craft within a primitive society or in our own society, you always see that familiarity with the name of a thing is the direct outcome of familiarity with how to use this thing."¹ And enrichment of vocabulary includes, of course, the acquisition of new words, new modifications of words already in use, new ways of using words already acquired, new phrases and new constructions. In brief: to enlarge vocabulary we must enlarge experience; similarly, to enlarge experience, we must extend vocabulary—and increase reading; and that is exactly what is done in the best teaching of literature. Of course, literature has not that direct purpose, but that is one of its effects.

We see, therefore, that the worn-out dictum "every teacher is a teacher of English" is of small value if it is to mean that every teacher should correct the spelling, punctuation and incorrect grammar of his pupil's written work—as many of those in authority appear to think it means.

¹ *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*. Vol. II.

But it would be of great value if we were to put into practice the theory that when a teacher of any subject whatsoever trains his pupils with the help of exact language to think clearly, and when he takes pains to present new facts with precision, and so helps them to focus their minds on exact, vitally interesting facts in his own subject, he will be helping them to master knowledge, and at the same time also the language expressing it. This is often done by really good teachers without their realising the excellence of their own work and their contributions to the teaching of ~~the~~ pupils' mother tongue ; but it might be vastly better if all teachers were consciously to aim at exact thought in their own subjects, and at their pupils' precise expression of detail, and were to pay more attention than is customary to the words and phrasing of the facts and conceptions that their pupils are working on. And to do this, not in order to benefit their English and so save their English teacher trouble ; but in order to get their own subjects understood clearly, learnt completely and remembered exactly. For if their pupils could grasp the facts and information with verbally sharpened precision of thought, they would be able to retain the pith and marrow of that knowledge in memory. Because if the thought, idea or conception is apprehended with distinctness and certainty, it will later be possible for it to re-appear in memory with much of its original clear-cut quality ; whereas if it has never been conceived precisely, with the aid of a clarity of language, the blurred lines are likely to become still more faded ; in consequence later recall becomes less and less *possible*.

If he has a new thought, he must explain it to others, in order that, finding them able to understand it, he may be sure it is a good one.
R. G. COLLINGWOOD. *The Principles of Art*.

Chapter 4

THE TEACHER'S TASK

To excite the self-activity in a suitable province is the chef d'œuvre of the teacher's art. . . . Knowledge comes . . . as a by-product and inevitable consequence.

J. G. FICHTE. *Address to the German Nation.*

It is of some importance to decide whether the pupil is to be helped to improve his command of his mother tongue, or whether he is to be taught to write 'correct English,' or to practise some other skill. Some teachers concentrate throughout the school composition course on teaching their pupils to write 'essays,' though they are not always aware that that is all they are doing ; by this they achieve the virtue of a singleness of aim, which with their unflagging drive secures undoubted success in a limited field. We must admit too that it is often of extreme importance for the future life of a pupil to receive a good report on English in his certificate ; but it is obvious to those who take a long view that the same end can be achieved, and with even greater success, and often with the achievement of other aims too, by other means than by focusing attention on a formal objective long before the pupils are ready for that type of work. To try to force the pace, and to drill pupils in work that is far beyond their powers, is to hamper one's own efforts.

Let us look at the practice of those teachers whose pupils leave school with the ability to use their mother tongue skilfully and expressively. They concentrate on a varied use of language, on the expression of things that are of vital

interest to children, on story-writing, play-making and producing, on the production of weekly school or form bulletins, on wall-newspapers, form magazines. They do not fix their pupils' attention on 'correctness,' or on the conventional form of the literary essay until the final stage of the school course, and they certainly do not pin their faith on language exercises of the intelligence-test type, nor do they waste precious periods on 'drilling in' the use of the comma, the filling in of blank spaces, or on such mechanical and superficial work.

But if one is not, from the beginning, to aim at the production of well-planned essays, with formal opening, continuous development and logical conclusion, should one encourage originality, freshness of treatment and personal view-point to the exclusion of everything else? Surely it is important for our pupils to be able to write correct English with accurate spelling and good punctuation! *Of course* the teacher must work for these things, must give attention to 'correctness,' to the form of written composition; but these should have only a subsidiary place in the lower and middle school programme, for "in each individual, formal training has its limit of usefulness."¹

But the teacher's main responsibility is to help his pupils to gain a mastery over language, that is, the control and use of an instrument; and he will carry out this responsibility best by seeing that they employ language for many purposes and on as many occasions as possible. His responsibility corresponds to that of the manual instructor, whose boys come to him with poor skill in the use of hammer, saw and plane, and who need to be trained to use those tools with care, precision and pride. These boys do not acquire precise skills by doing formal woodwork exercises and

¹ A. N. WHITEHEAD. *Process and Reality*.

nothing else, but by making book-shelves, tool-chests, model motor-boats, with occasional exercises to develop some special skill. There is the double function in this work, as there is in language teaching: there is the mastery of the instrument, and the use of the instrument to make something. There is in language work, as in woodwork, metal-work, pottery, in almost anything demanding the use of tools, both skill and art. Neither can be neglected with impunity.

The work of the teacher of English is also more akin to that of the teacher of art than to that of the other members of staff. The teacher of art gives practice and training in the handling of pencil and brush, he sets his pupils various kinds of expression-work, and encourages experiment in expression and independence of execution. Similarly the English teacher has to train his pupils in the use of a medium in which some skill has already been acquired, and he has to develop that skill by giving practice in expression, and a training which will improve accuracy of linguistic response to experience. But the work of the language teacher goes further: he has to develop also his pupils' powers of comprehension and of alert awareness to meanings of all kinds—to inner, verbal meanings that their own minds formulate, and the suggestions of outer experience that their senses respond to. There is thus a wide complexity of form and content for them to respond to, to cope with and to master.

We shall be concerned here only with language as expression, and with the pupils' training in language. We need not consider the teaching of facts and theories *about* language—with figures of speech, the history of language, changes in meaning, derivations or grammatical classifications; because for the great majority of pupils in secondary schools the ability to *use* language effectively and appropriately is vastly

more important to them than to be able to reproduce what they have read or have been told about language. How to use language, how to make it carry out their varied intentions and needs, how to manipulate it so that it will express to others just what the user intended or hoped to express : that is what matters to our pupils. So the field that we are to investigate is that of the teaching of the mother tongue as a medium of expression, of communication and of self-communion—the mother tongue as an instrument that can give shape and recognisable form to most of ~~the~~ diverse types of mental activity.

It should be unnecessary to comment on the importance of adequate instruction in the mother tongue as a means of securing full and accurate understanding of the other subjects on the school curriculum ; but it is not often realized by teachers of science, history, geography, that a pupil's inexpert handling of language in explanation, description and narration may be one of the main causes of his failure to master the subject, or to retain what he has studied. So, too, the language in which a pupil recalls what he has heard or read may be so inexact or over-simplified that from the beginning inaccuracies and vagueness are ingrained in that pupil's knowledge and conceptions of the subject, his later work all suffering in consequence. These inaccuracies of fact and conception are often due, no doubt, in the first instance, to the pupil's lack of ability in handling language. To a very great extent it is true, therefore, that if the teacher of English gives his pupils a thorough and careful training in the medium of instruction, he will be contributing to progress in the learning of the other subjects of the curriculum. Good English teaching in a school is essential ; this does not mean efficient teaching only, it means teaching aimed at the right things : mainly at developing the pupils'

skill in handling language in all types of expression and in comprehending all types of meaning with precision and alertness.

So it is evident that language has a central position in the school education of children, though we must also admit that learning *about* language is often forced into more prominence in the school work of the younger children than is necessary for their natural and balanced development. Leaving this for discussion elsewhere, we turn again to the rôle of language in the child's life: language in our society at present is of such importance to the child that the development of his ability to use language effectively is closely related to the development of his mind and character, and to every manifestation of his mind and character in almost every moment of his private and social life: "Words are part of man's nature and reach not his ears only, but his very soul."¹

The teacher of English, then, has some responsibility in developing the complete life of the child, and also for the whole of the child at any one moment; the breaking down, therefore, of the child's activities into isolated 'subjects' (grammar, punctuation) can never achieve as much as the practice of the fundamental skills in the full context of a living situation, where as in some real and absorbing event, the whole mind—imagination, thought, feeling and emotion—character and body are active.

In addition to this wide conception of language in school, where it pervades almost every activity as a major ingredient, there is the more restricted view that the language work should be, at least in upper forms, a useful and effective discipline. This idea of the English work being a discipline should not be contaminated by the very inadequate conception,

¹ LONGINUS. *On the Sublime*.

held by many teachers even in these times, that it does not matter so much what they teach, or how their subject is taught, provided it is made difficult and arduous for their pupils (and also kept dry—forgetting that drought and sterility usually go together). This hard-dying theory, seldom openly expressed now, but often jealously hoarded among other out-worn defensive slogans in the last ditch of muddled conviction, does not make explicit what it is that the pupil should be subjected to. Difficulty may be a stimulus, and need not exclude interest ; but ~~the~~ difficulty of a barren, and unprofitable task, which many of these teachers seem to think is the best material for disciplining the young, can only stultify and disappoint young minds. On the other hand, when a topic or task is full of interest to a pupil, an effective and searching discipline can be enforced with every possibility of profit and renewed endeavour. So, too, the attractiveness and fruitfulness of a subject will arouse the energies and perseverance needed to master the demands of clear and exact expression ; and this continual drive for precise language will directly promote clear and accurate thought and understanding.

We have to remember also that as language is a system of perceptible signs by the help of which we can be conscious of what we have in mind, and by the help of which we can ponder on what has happened to us, what is going on around us, and what action we should carry out, the more complete our mastery of this system of signs, the greater will be our power to learn, to think clearly and understand accurately, to imagine, to reason, and to act, for “ Language is not merely an accompaniment of conceptual activity ; it is an instrument essential to its development.” ¹

¹ STOUT. *Manual of Psychology*.

In all speech, words and sense are as the body and the soul. The sense is as the life and soul of language, without which all words are dead. Sense is wrought out of experience, the knowledge of human life and actions, or of the liberal arts. . . .

BEN JONSON. *Discoveries or Timber.*

Chapter 5

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES : EXPERIENCE

Much philosophy is wanted for the correct observation of things which are before our eyes.

ROUSSEAU.

The art of education will never attain complete clearness in itself without philosophy.

J. G. FICHTE. *Address to the German Nation.*

We come now to the principles underlying the methods that will be recommended later for use in the classroom. It is, of course, unsound to make use of a method without an understanding of the theory which is the basis of the various steps in classroom procedure. That is generally admitted, but not everyone would go so far as to affirm that the principles are more important than the practical method. Yet further reflection makes it evident to us that a firm grasp of principle will enable a teacher to adapt any method to suit a class, and to devise new ones, whereas a rigid method is suitable only to a very limited number of classes. Neglect of principle will often lead to waste of time and effort ; and unless the teaching is based on a clear understanding of the processes and ends involved, disappointment will follow. On this point Sir Percy Buck's emphatic statement should not be forgotten : "The accumulation of facts may make you well-informed, but knowledge and wisdom come from the discovery of principle."¹

It is obvious from the number of school textbooks on

¹ *The Scope of Music.*

composition which concentrate on punctuation, paragraphing, choice of words, and on other minor aspects of this subject, rather than on developing the fundamental linguistic abilities, that many teachers of English have not given enough attention to the processes involved, or to the study of the somewhat obscure ways in which children improve their use of their mother tongue. The challenge here is to the accepted ways of attempting to foster progress in language skill: to the habit of giving injunctions ("I want you to write me a good essay, children"), to the over-reliance on the effect of examples of 'good' writing, to the use of the competitive spur—the winning of marks or praise. These techniques, if we may call them that, are in constant use in our schools to-day; but they are often ineffective, though they may produce a desired result when backed by a forceful or persuasive or attractive personality, or when some other external influence (physical, moral or emotional) is brought to bear on the pupils—as it is often brought to bear, because it is patently necessary, there being nothing else to promote progress.

We believe with Rousseau that "much philosophy is wanted," so that we propose to examine the foundations of this matter: the teaching of written English. We deal first with four major principles, and then with three subsidiary ones. The main principles are: (a) Expression is closely related to Experience, (b) Purpose is the source and sustaining impulse of Expression, (c) Interest provides attention and staying power, and (d) A clearly focused Aim gives direction and certainty, as well as a criterion for the selection of words, etc. The subsidiary principles are (a) Pupil Responsibility, (b) the value of confidence, and (c) a mastery of language cannot be acquired without Practice. These will now be discussed in detail.

A. Expression is closely related to Experience. There are those who believe that children should write only about what they have experienced, and that this principle should be followed to the exclusion of all else ; but this cannot be entirely sound, because language is used by everyone for such a number of varied purposes. It is important, however, that pupils' experiences should be made full use of in helping them to improve their written work ; for the simple reason that these are important to the pupils. Mr. T. Raymont says in his wise and valuable book, *From Seven to Eleven* : "What the child writes about should be that which arises out of his actual experience, awaiting and perhaps struggling for spontaneous expression." Unfortunately, a great number of children's experiences are too often not vital enough to be ready waiting for expression ; they are often so lacking in value that they have never made any distinct impression on the child's mind ; consequently they soon fade and disappear for ever. But if we can make use of those experiences that do await expression, then all will be well, for we then have the force of reality and significance as the basis of the child's language. And when the child's expression follows on some urgently felt experience, it comes as the result and the fulfilment of that experience : it is then of singularly striking value to the child. Though we must admit that these conditions cannot as a rule be secured for all the pupils in a class, or frequently enough even for the few, and they cannot always be secured in every lesson in which individual work is being done. But we must never neglect the opportunity of promoting expression of children's experience, and for the first two or three years in a secondary school the expression of such experiences should form the core of the work, though other exercises as well may be undertaken with profit and as a stimulus to progress.

It is advisable to examine this principle more closely. Let us question the theory of 'no expression without impression.' It is clear that if impressions are weak, and if experiences themselves are misty and transient, they will not only be of little importance in the child's life, and therefore not worth expressing, but they will actually be *unrealized*. That is to say, they will have had no exact effect on the child's consciousness and on his feelings, and will therefore have made no contribution worth considering to his growth—physical, intellectual, spiritual and imaginative ; for there will be no precise awareness, no distinct residue of imagery, no vestige of emotion to stir him, no definite memory to enrich his inner life and personality. In other words, there will have been a failure in *living*, that is, in experiencing some useful, or otherwise valuable, moment. Not only a failure in awareness, of consciousness, but a failure in the inner life of the soul. Therefore to attempt to make use of such experiences, and to try to recall memories such as these, may be doing harm, for it may encourage insincerity and falseness. These experiences are not fit material for expression, whether with pen or paint ; and not only are they not fit, but they can make no contribution to the process and activity of learning to write. They have no power to engage the impulses of expression. Moreover, they may have an impeding action on the process of expressing, for the pupil will flounder about, vainly trying to seize his own vague ideas and faded impressions. The attempt to express them cannot call up sincere and exact language, as there is nothing sincere or precise to express ; and therefore all that is called up to be embodied in words is something unimportant and unreal, and in fact, unrealizable. Can we be surprised then if the words and ideas produced by children who are asked to write about such

experiences are false and stilted, or imitative and superficial ?

The implication is clear. The experiences that are to be written up, and utilized to help children to write better, must be vivid and personally realised. They may appear trivial and of everyday quality to an adult, but provided they belong intimately to the child's life, that does not matter. If they have contributed in even the most minute way to the individual life of the child, have been felt by him as something distinct, and have been attended to with at least a momentary glance of interest, then they may be of real value to the child as material for expression. It follows from this that it is essential for the teacher to help the children to realize their experiences, to encourage them to use their ears and eyes, and to concentrate their full powers on what is happening before them at the moment. Our command to teachers then should be : " Make them *see*, make them listen, make them attend to things everywhere—to the clear lines and exact shapes of the living reality impinging on them—so that it *does* impinge, and so that colour, form and sound are not passed over or neglected through indifference or laziness. Help them to receive the impact of the real world : if then language expressed their impressions and thoughts it would mean so much more to them, and their use of it would grow in clarity and precision." Colours, forms and sounds of city and factory even will serve—there are always colours, forms and sounds worth recording in language everywhere ; but when these have been found in woodlands, in moving water, among rocks on a seashore, in heath-land and coppice, the responses of the children and their expression in language are so generous and rewarding that the right procedure will never afterwards be doubted. What Margaret Bulley said about the artist's work applies also here : " Without the stimulus and variety

offered by contact with nature and with the world about him, his work would tend to become monotonous and devitalized, and would grow too subjective in character " ¹—"for to any one with senses there is always something worth describing, and town and country are but one continuous subject." ²

The increase in language that comes through perceived differentiations of quality and detail comes when apprehensions and impressions are distinct and intimate. And language that comes as new expression to the child—to reveal new and *enjoyed* perceptions—enriches experience and deepens it ; and so with language we can say : " Open, Sesame ! " and the rich variety of the world and its infinite wealth of detail become perceptible to us, and *known*. And each new beauty and new delight, discovered and held in mind, even if only for a moment, increases our capacity for appreciating the best, and also for apprehending something still finer—for the further enrichment of mind and thought and personality.

Once children have become aware of what they sincerely experience, and once they begin to realize the interest of struggling to find adequate words to catch the fleeting moment of some unusual or absorbing experience, and once they discover the satisfaction of finding words that express and also light up the things they have seen and enjoyed, they will give all their attention and their energies to this happy activity of creative expression, for it will be creative for them, though at first very simple and unformed. The forming, the pruning and the modelling of the design in words may come soon, perhaps for a few at the beginning, or it may come late ; but first, unformed attempts must be encouraged and fostered. For the linguistically-able child

¹ *Art and Counterfeit.*

² R. L. STEVENSON.

the original conceptions resulting from experience have usually to be re-thought and re-born in a new pattern : the shaping of the experience and the expression of it in words go on together, both receiving a new form, and possibly a simple continuity and fair proportion, with a developing theme and natural conclusion. But for nearly all children this will have to be learnt step by step and without hurry, through the same kind of procedure : the focusing of attention on the experience itself.

Usually something can be done outside the ordinary syllabus to widen the children's experience and to deepen it. The first essential is to encourage wide reading, by talks and discussions on books, by making book-lists for the different classes, and by the fullest use of the school library. As the main concern is language, reading will be one of the most fruitful ways of getting language attended to, and the best language sometimes flowing through the mind. But language without 'realized living experience,' with its diversity and depth, is a vain echo of trivial and rootless thought ; for " words, the counters of ideas, are, however, easily taken for ideas. And in just the degree in which mental activity is separated from active concern with the world . . . words, symbols, come to take the place of ideas. The substitution is the more subtle because some meaning is recognized." ¹ So that to help children to acquire a varied, full-bodied and exact language it is necessary to widen their lives by promoting visits of all kinds, outings, camps, journeys, dramatic and musical and poetry festivals, hobbies, concerts, socials, and especially expeditions into the country and to harbours and sea-shore, so that they can see, and possibly take a small part in, work of all kinds in farm and field and by water, among animals and living things. At

¹ J. DEWEY- *Principles of Education*.

all times and at all ages, children need varied and vital experiences, distinct impressions and the focusing power of interesting activities to stimulate their linguistic responses and their desires to express themselves in language ; for we should never forget in teaching children, and even adults too, that " sense experiences are the raw material of thought " ¹ and " our earliest, strongest impressions, our most intimate convictions, are simply images added to more or less of sensation. These are the primitive instruments of thought." ²

. . . ordinary schools where . . . the child no longer manipulates a single object, and where his thought sinks deeper and deeper into verbalism.

J. PIAGET. *The Language and Thought of the Child.*

The points which I wish to stress are, firstly, the co-operative character of speech, and, secondly, the fact that it is always concerned with things, that is to say with the realities both of the external world and of man's inner experience.

A. H. GARDINER. *The Theory of Speech and Language.*

¹ J. J. ROUSSEAU. *Emile.*

² GEORGE ELIOT. *Leaves from a Note-Book.*

Chapter 6

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES : PURPOSE

Human will and endeavour lie at the root of all language and linguistic usage.

A. H. GARDINER. *The Theory of Speech and Language.*

Surely teachers of English should have asked themselves long ago : " What are the true sources and mainsprings of expression ? "—" What in the core of our being, among the unconscious currents of our innermost impulses, is there that impels us to write, to draw, to paint, to sing, to act ? " It would, however, give a wrong idea of the impulses that lead us in this way or that, if we were to refer to one or two simple urges, as the impulses inciting or impelling us to expression are complex and interpenetrating ; nevertheless, we ought to be aware of their variety and ubiquity. There is, for instance, the need to communicate, arising from reactions which cause us to develop social habits ; there is the impulse to seek satisfactions and so to repeat what we have reacted to ; there is the impulse to exert our energies to impress others, or to persuade them, or to dominate them and to overcome their slowness or unwillingness to co-operate, and there is the impulse, so often working secretly below the bright reflecting surface of consciousness, to be important or dominant in some situation or other. There is also the obscure creative urge to initiate some action or undertaking and to bring it to some kind of conclusion. In all our activities some satisfaction is sought or some end in view is pursued, in hidden or overt ways.

Often the pursuit of some purposeful end is an insistent driving force ; though children, who have few responsibilities, and do not know what will happen to them in the future, often have no regular driving force in their lives. Yet there can be little doubt that the main source and impulse of every kind of expression in any medium is ' purpose ' ; so " in beginning to learn the learner must have a fixed purpose." ¹

- o. Now the driving force of ' purpose ' far surpasses that of ' Interest,' in importance. In the past little account was taken of this essential element in learning. The schooling of generations of children was vacuous, boring and mechanical, because educationists then believed that good habits were best inculcated by strictly formal exercises. It has taken the educational world a very long time to discover that good habits are far more quickly and permanently formed when school activities are undertaken with an end in view, though too few educationists are assured that this is so. But in a truly educative process the work done by children should fulfil some demand, some natural need, and should bring some simple satisfaction. It follows from this that the purpose of formal tasks should be obvious to a child.

This theory of school work bringing some satisfaction to a child is not an off-shoot of the doctrine that everything should be made easy and pleasant for the pupil. Pleasure-giving occupations in school are not essential ; though purposeful occupations are. What children need are opportunities for being active purposively ; then when they are actively participating in some individual undertaking or in some communal and purposeful project, they give every evidence of satisfaction as well as of enjoyment. For they

¹ K. KOFFKA. *The Growth of the Mind.*

find interest and pleasure in being active, in the mere exertion ; though they derive much fuller satisfaction when those activities are directed towards some obviously useful or productive end. The language work that children do in school should therefore have some reasonable and natural purpose, that is to say, some purpose other than routine, custom or syllabus requirements. The purpose should be one that makes the work worth while to the children ; it may, however, be an imagined one, such as imagining that a description is needed for the finding of a lost child or a hidden treasure. In such instances the whole situation is imaginary, but the conventions of the situation are unhesitatingly accepted by the children, and the rules of the game are obeyed.

Furthermore, the purpose for which some work, such as a piece of composition, is to be done, need not be very ambitious or important ; some simple game or imagined situation is usually all that is required to tap the energies of the children's expression abilities. The compiling of a ten-page form magazine with different types of article contributed by individuals or groups of pupils, is a completely adequate end for most children. When they see their small contributions being accepted by their own editorial board, and then incorporated into the final version of their own magazine, they feel that their efforts have been of some avail ; and this feeling of satisfaction acts as an incentive for more careful or more ambitious work later. The consequence is that they put forth greater efforts, and these, in addition to their keenness and concentration on their subjects, cause the needed words to rise in consciousness with more ease ; and so expressive and exact words present themselves more readily—and improvement in the use of language has begun. One reason for this is that their minds

are focused unswervingly on a subject, and therefore they have it more clearly in mind and more fully and completely too, and also more realistically. As for the sluggish writers, those whose minds do not express themselves with any fluency or liveliness, but whose slow wits struggle to grind out a few laboured and ill-connected sentences, these are the pupils of course who need the really effective stimulus of a form magazine, for instance, to help them to overcome their initial mental inertia, and to set in motion their stiff and unexercised linguistic habits.

It was George Sampson who pointed out in his *English for the English* that children could write for a form newspaper or magazine, but not for the wastepaper basket. But this wise and practical criticism of an inherent weakness in the teaching of written composition in our schools has not had the effect that might have been expected from its obviousness and sound common-sense, though the obvious is all too often hidden from the eyes of the rule-of-thumb worker, and common-sense is more often brought in as an argument than applied in practical affairs.

So we see that writing just because there is 'homework' to be done, or because 'essay-writing' is on the syllabus, is not really an adequate purpose. The reason for doing the work must be *felt* to be adequate by the pupil if it is to be sincere, and if it is to be effective in promoting effort, in sustaining attention, and therefore in opening up the springs of thought, imagination and expression; and also if it is to free the minds of the linguistically ungifted pupils from their stultifying inertia, and engage them in lively and spontaneous expression.

So, apart from some occasional exercises, run through in the quick practice of some special skill, or to apply some details of a formal nature, all the writing of pupils up to

the 'certificate year' should be written with some useful purpose that is clearly perceived by the pupils themselves. It is not only wrong to let our pupils go on in faith without knowing where they are going, but unintelligent to expect anyone to put forth efforts for inadequate purposes and for wasteful ends. Furthermore, without a worth-while end in view, expression is likely to be merely mechanical, seeking the easy way in superficial and common-place forms and diction. Because in order to achieve improvement in the execution of any kind of expression, we must be faced by something which is exacting, which *tasks* our abilities, which involves us in some exertion in the overcoming of our medium. This exertion we have to make in order to re-fashion the words and word-patterns of our daily workaday speech so that they will reflect the exact shades of thought and the true qualities of the conceptions which could not be put into the slick words of common social exchanges. The effort, of course, may not always be felt consciously, because an urgent intention or wish, an incipient emotion or a gleam of creative imagining may be felt as excitement or tension, or as an impulse of attention merely, rather than as a perceived effort to manipulate language. To rouse this exertion and to sustain it, one must have a purpose which is acknowledged by one's individual sense of values to be worth while—and children are not deceived if it is not !

Before passing on to the examination of some possible objectives, we must consider a few that are inadmissible, though often made use of in our schools to-day. We can dismiss one or two of these summarily : it is not sufficient usually to rely solely on the interest of a subject, nor do we admit the right of the spur of competition to be used as the means of securing progress. It is far more important for our pupils to perceive their *own* progress, and to realize

that they have achieved some success, even though it is small, than for them to have an eye always on the progress of their fellows—or to try to over-reach them.

Our pupils should not be given opportunities for working in order to gain a teacher's approval or public praise or for more marks than a companion. Some of these 'aids to learning,' we must admit, have the effect of securing the progress of some pupils ; but they are transient encouragements. Such incitements are insecure, for if they are made use of in practical affairs like this, they may adversely affect the sense of values of many pupils. If we consistently allot rewards for work well done, we must not expect a pupil to work for its own sake, nor should we imagine that we are engendering a love of learning. And if we rely on the approval of the teacher to get good work done, without developing the pupil's understanding of what is good and bad in his own writing, we must not expect independence and the attainment of a high standard (say, in an examination) when the teacher's approval is not available.

In his two books on the writing of English,¹ Sir Philip Hartog pleaded, with force and reason, for the writing of school pupils to be directed always to a known audience, and for the intention of the writer to be clarified : " Is it a message or a record ? " The principle proposed here is in line with his convictions on the subject, though it goes somewhat further and demands even more exactness, so that all his arguments apply here with equal force and cogency. Thus, not only should the audience be decided upon and message or record be selected, but the writer should know why he is writing—to inform, to instruct, to advise, to persuade, to command, and so on, *and* the writing itself should be produced for some useful end.

¹ *The Writing of English*, 1908, and *Words in Action*, 1947.

Now what useful end is it possible to have for written work within the busy and changing context of the ordinary school week, with its interruptions for medical inspections, play rehearsals, preparations for school events, interviews, etc.? It is, fortunately, not at all necessary to plan an ambitious programme, or to upset the school routine in any way; often in day-to-day teaching quite simple proposals are sufficient. For instance, the writing programme for the term's work might consist of tackling various kinds of writing in turn: a short story, a report of some event, a short biography, an account of a scientific exploration, a summary of some investigation, a letter. The plan, of course, must be explained to the class at the beginning of the term; so that everyone understands that different techniques, variations of arrangement, differences of 'tone' and content, for these various kinds of writing will have to be studied and mastered. What could be more interesting than for pupils of thirteen or fourteen to put all their productions of the term together, and to compile from them a number of small magazines, one for each group of four or five pupils? There will certainly be time spent planning the possible contributions, selecting editors, proof-readers, and perhaps printers (or scribes) and more time spent in deciding which production in each group will be finally selected to represent that group's best effort in each *genre*; but time devoted to planning will not be time wasted, for thorough discussion at the beginning is an essential stage in the process of calling into play the pupils' linguistic abilities, and of tapping the deeper sources of their interest and will and expression.

It surely must be evident to all, even to those who pin their faith on getting their pupils through school examinations by keeping to a rigid course of 'essay-writing,' that

if children see that their efforts are directed towards the production of some tangible undertaking, such as a form magazine or monthly bulletin, even if imaginary, they will apply themselves to their tasks with much more energy and care than they otherwise would. When they devote themselves in this way to their writing, there is some chance of their learning to express themselves with clarity and exactness, for they become aware of the *need* for these qualities ; otherwise, without an objective in view, there is no pressure or necessity to achieve them, save the exhortations of the school-master ! Furthermore "habitual idleness will not exist if the child is made to feel that its education is teaching it something worth knowing."¹

What other kinds of work would satisfy the wishes and hopes of growing children to be useful, and to produce something in their everyday lives ? Instead of a composite production containing a variety of types of writing, each addressed to a reader in a different way, with varying levels of colloquial and studied language, and with various degrees of success in entertaining and instructing, let us suppose that special attention in a composite course is to be given to description, or to character sketches, or to some other fairly homogeneous type of writing. Instead of setting conventional exercises in description, such as to describe a football, a hockey pitch, ink-well or form-room, as is sometimes done, the problem faced by the pupils should be the same as that faced by someone in everyday life ; for instance, a series of notices of 'Lost Property' could be drawn up as if for display on a prefects' notice-board, or outside a police-station. Or if a class is accustomed to exercises requiring them to imagine things in a living situation, the task could be presented in a dramatic setting, and both

¹ BERTRAND RUSSELL. *On Education*.

character of the finder and the lost article be described, and possibly too the Lost Property official and his office, and perhaps the enquirer entering to ask for his lost possession—as always, directly we begin to imagine the real life situation, we have a little play : the over-officious official, the forgetful loser and a little scene of rival interests. By this time a class will be thoroughly roused and eager to get to work.

Another purposeful compilation for a class to work at is a descriptive catalogue for the school or a local museum, or for an imaginary museum, so that the more imaginative can let their fancies range from prehistoric monsters to the latest aircraft or guided missile. Pupils with interests in model-making, sailing, aircraft, wild flowers, insects, butterflies and birds, will take the greatest delight in compiling little dictionaries of types of aircraft, engines, living things, etc., with illustrations, notes and first-hand observations. Here again the pupil has a faithful and usable criterion, for he can try his results on his fellows and on his form-master, and if interest, surprise or pleasure is recorded by them he knows that his efforts have been successful ; and that gives him the confidence he needs.

Many of our pupils fail to make any improvement in their work because they have lost heart and have no confidence in their own abilities ; though nearly all pupils, even in a ' D ' set, relegated there through poor performance in English, can write quite well enough when they have gained confidence, and when their interest has been fostered by these ' living ' methods. This has been found to be true by those teachers who have tackled the problem of ' the poor writer,' and have given thought, energy—and courage to it.

With a Third or Fourth Year class the descriptions to be attempted will be more complex than these, such as

descriptions of 'characters.' Then the class can work as a team, or in groups, to make 'A Gallery of Historical Portraits,' or 'A Gallery of Heroes and Rogues,' perhaps culled from the 'characters' they hear talking on the lighter hours of wireless programmes. If more individual work is required, then 'My Ancestors—real and imaginary,' might serve the purpose, or 'My Favourites' (books, flowers, pets, places, outings, almost anything will serve), though here the criterion would have to be 'interest' rather than pictorial vividness. For more ambitious work the description of varied types can be linked in some way or other, for instance, 'A Shopping Queue' (with its wide variety of possibilities in characterisation), or 'At the local polling booth.' The fun of thinking out varied types, and of touching off some distinctive feature with a happy phrase or humorous detail, is a valuable ingredient in the business of composing. Those with more lively imaginations might describe the most perfect moments throughout a fine summer day—each of the group writing on his special choice: very early in the morning, early forenoon, high noon, and so on. Perhaps a title like 'The Dance of the Hours' will stimulate a class; or 'A Ballet of Winter,' with its moonlit frost, sun and snow, fire and festival, might arouse delight, and a special skill with words. This being successful, 'The Pageant of the Months' or 'A Pageant of Local History' might follow.

If the written work for a stretch of some weeks is to centre on 'the explanation of processes,' 'how things are made,' and 'how mechanical things work,' then this would be the occasion for planning a 'How-to-do-it' or 'How-it-works' volume, with a team of contributors, each one an expert in his own technical field, and dealing with such things as 'blowing up a football,' 'mending a puncture,'

'soldering a wireless earth,' 'blowing a bird's egg.' Co-operation with teachers of other subjects may be secured by having such compilations on science, woodwork, cookery, Guiding, written in the English lesson ; and the woodwork and other manual instructors may be willing to take part in a scheme to write up 'Model-Making' or 'Apparatus Construction.' These compilations need not be restricted to notes on the making of ships, aircraft, vehicles, etc. ; but a wider interest may be fostered by encouraging descriptions of other things, such as camp messing-equipment, or toy-making for younger brothers and sisters, and the making of useful household things, such as plate-racks, book-rests, window-boxes. So, too, the Domestic Science mistress can help in the discussion and planning of compilations entitled 'Home and Camp Cookery,' 'Household Hints,' 'Dress-making for Dolls and Puppets.' If there is an active stamp-collecting club (or photographic society) in the school, some classes would readily plan a volume on 'The Art and Craft of Stamp-Collecting,' and different groups in a class could deal with different aspects of the hobby. These are examples¹ of the kind of productive work that all classes up to the fourth year in a secondary school readily take to and enjoy doing ; there are many other kinds of corporate and 'project' undertakings that are, in effect, purposive work.

Another possibility of quite a different kind is the compiling of anthologies of the best work done during each term, or during the year. These compilations can be made both by the teacher and by the form. Into these go the best pieces of writing ; and by applying different criteria these two anthologies can have different purposes : in the teacher's

¹ See an example, in Appendix C, compiled by a class in a school in Kent.

can go the most original work done, and in the other the most interesting or the most instructive ; or narrative only can be included in the one, and in the other, reports, accounts of events and other factual matter. Competition enters into the field but not in a forceful way as there are no material prizes to be won. In some schools each pupil has his own anthology in which his best work is written up ; this is a good plan, but proper attention must be given to the books when completed ; for instance, by including them in the annual exhibition of the Lower School work, or on 'Open Days,' or by using them in further composition work, such as in the developing of criticism, or in comparative work, each boy using his own work. As often as possible some *use* should be made of work completed, though this needs thought and careful planning as well as positive action ; and the better the use that written work is put to, the more effort the writers are likely to give to their writings. But superficial or insincere promotion of effort by vague promises is soon detected by children and despised by them ; on the other hand interested action, even though unexciting, will have a discernable and sometimes a striking effect.

Writing with some end in view may be looked at in another way : instead of considering reasons or purpose for producing written compositions, we can concern ourselves with the more immediate motive of each writer, *e.g.* to instruct, to entertain, to persuade, or to explain. If we set a class to write with some limited motive, and follow this up by judging the writing solely on the success or failure to carry out that motive (with minor penalties for incorrectness), we shall see again that when the writers have something definite to achieve, a definite problem or task to be attacked, this is a challenge and an incentive to them to write better.

The motives may be quite simple : to interest, for instance, thus : " Tell me exactly what you enjoyed most during your camping holiday " ; to entertain or to instruct, thus : " Tell me exactly what diet you give your pet rabbit," or " Explain to me—for I don't know—exactly what happens when a passing car interferes with a television set " or " Use all the arguments you can to convince the class that cricket is a game only for boys, or that the Light Programme is better than the Home Service " ; or to describe : " Describe the haunted house in your story so that we can draw it," or " Explain how to get from X to Y so that we can draw a sketch map of the route."

For the success of the tasks presented in this way, it is essential to apply tests, and for the pupils to apply the tests to their own writings, for this is even more fruitful than applying them to the writings of others ; though it is still more important that our pupils should have training in finding out exactly where there is failure in their own work, and in trying to remedy it. If a task is repeated, and in a second or third try success is achieved, the mental stature of the pupil is strengthened ; but teachers usually fight shy of having tasks repeated, not realizing how very stimulating success may be when it follows failure—unfortunately many teachers have never known real failure ; and still more unfortunately most teachers never try to give training of this kind, for they insist on doing all the correcting themselves. We have to keep in mind when planning work for young pupils, and often for older ones too, that the surmounting of clearly perceived obstacles is a wonderful stirrer of enthusiasm for learning, and is of the very essence of true education. The insight gained by the pupil into the skill or art that he is attempting to master, the gain in certainty, and the increasing desire to learn more, are all

vital to the deepening and extending of the pupil's mind and character, and to the establishing on a stable and unassailable basis of his knowledge and faith in learning. As Keats said in a letter to Benjamin Bailey : " Probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer,"¹ and we might especially think about ' worth ' in that context. But how many educationists advise that pupils' ardour in their mental pursuits should be fostered, and perhaps inspired ?

In considering the advisability of pupils having a purpose in their school work, the question may arise : why is it so important to have a purpose or motive ? It is a moral question, in that the energies of men should not be employed in purposeless work ; and it is a matter of plain common-sense too, for our pupils' energies and abilities are not fully or keenly brought into play when they write for school routine requirements. But there are also more particular reasons for directing the work towards useful ends, reasons closely bound up with the business of learning to write. The first reason is that, if we have a purpose in view, we have a definite focus, and therefore a certain clarity of mind initially ; consequently a clarity and appropriateness of language is, as it were, guaranteed from the outset. Without some activating motive both the content and the wording of our written productions are often feeble and dull, and this is because there is nothing to give them point and precision ; and there is no standard to be aimed at, and no urgent or obvious necessity for clarity ; indeed, there is no particular reason why the writer should express what he has in mind in one way rather than in another ; consequently all is vague, flat and without direction. And the continual and enforced churning out of dull and spineless

¹ Sept., 1818. *cit.* JAMES SUTHERLAND : *The Medium of Poetry*.

work, in whatever medium soever, must inevitably have some effect in dulling and deadening the responsive and malleable minds of children. As this is so often not realized, can we be surprised that English children (and adults) have nothing like the command over and interest in their mother tongue that French children and adults have? If every teacher of English wrote for *gain* and had discovered for himself the secret of good writing, and was able to make use of this in his teaching, there would be hope of improvement; but when we have discovered that the secret 'to learn to write well, is that the pupil must be mentally alert, and have the will to do the job efficiently,' we have still to find out what it is to write well. Nevertheless an end in view and a clearly perceived task to be attempted provide a challenge, and they make clear to the pupil the necessity for this alertness and this 'will to succeed.' But educationists all over the world are still only half convinced that "intellect works not alone but incited by the emotions and directed by the will,"¹ or else they are afraid to apply that in their teaching.

This leads us to the next point: if we know whom we are addressing, and whether we are instructing, or amusing, or informing, or persuading, we have effective criteria to guide us in selecting both content and language. This, of course, is obvious, but perhaps we are not always sufficiently aware that 'audience' and 'purpose' effectively dictate the manner, style and level of children's writing; and this occurs without any instruction to the children on the matter, provided the purpose and audience are clearly enough realized by them. To test this, one can set a class to write an editorial for some imaginary magazine, and later to write one for their own magazine that they are producing:

¹ ARISTOTLE. *Ethics*.

the two editorials will be found to be on quite different levels of 'tone,' vocabulary and content. One of the reasons why children's writing improves so slowly is because in the planning and in the presentation of the work to them no heed is taken of the natural guides and touchstones to expression.

There are two reasons for 'purpose' and 'audience' to be defined and operative in the children's writing that are concerned with wider issues than incentives to learning and progress in skill and expressiveness. Children in secondary schools, though immature physically and young in experience and with an individual life of the spirit often only half awake, should not be treated like dumb animals or as unfeeling, unreasoning, unaspiring human dummies, mere 'personnel,' or heads to be counted and bodies to be pushed here and there. That is often the fatal and perhaps inescapable result of having very large schools ; it comes from an unconscious way of thinking and acting to which heads of departments and institutions, and all administrators, are peculiarly susceptible. With large classes, and even sometimes with small, there is always the necessity to remind ourselves that we are dealing with personalities, and with personalities that differ one from another, and with beings who have hopes and fears, longings and antipathies, and who have yearnings for happiness, for success, for recognition as individuals in an adult world, and for *they know not what*. Beings who strive to secure all that they build up ideally for themselves in their thoughts and imaginings. And the cynic would be wrong if he thought that all that they imagined was purely selfish in a greedy, dog-in-the-manger way. Children yearn for better things for themselves certainly, but through this runs a strong desire to be *useful*, to produce something worth while, to take part in

producing that which will have a wider benefit than to themselves alone, and above all they especially long to take part in some high enterprise, some noble crusade or grand undertaking to which they can give themselves unreservedly. So there is a very pressing need for schools to ensure that the work that its pupils do is felt by them to fulfil some more useful purpose than merely to improve their skill ; the work should also satisfy the children and not conflict with their ideals, and it should develop and become more exacting and more worth while as the children move up the school, and as these ideals become progressively clearer and more active in their lives. When they get older they should be able to perceive that their curriculum equips them, and qualifies them for work of a worthy and useful nature. Can we say that this is widely realized, when so often school children are given endless routine and apparently aimless tasks, and to do work which does not inspire, and which gives no satisfaction to their deeper needs and aspirations ? Some drill and routine of course are necessary, but there may be far too much for many children. If more were done to feed the spiritual impulses of youth, and to satisfy children's finer yearnings and hopes, and which would help them to find contentment and faith in taking part in worthy productions and projects, schools would discover, as many have already, that the energies and abilities of their pupils, and their whole personalities, too, would become livelier, more balanced, more persevering, and also more capable of undertaking severer tasks and responsibilities. One has only to suggest to a class of young children that they should produce something tangible and useful to see an immediate response of concentrated energy, and to find later that that energy was sustained over a long period. The response is even greater when the plan

that they have to work at is inspired by some simple, though sincere, ideal.

Finally, it is best if some of the school work is designed to give the children the opportunity and encouragement to *make* something ; for "There is no doubt about the existence of the impulse to make something, or about the stabilizing effect of having given it expression."¹ In all subjects, even in teaching mathematics, there are possibilities for this ; but the aim is not to teach the pupil to turn out something with fine finish, for few can do that. The value is in the making, and in the actual presence of some home-made thing produced by the children's own hands, which acts as the concrete proof of their own powers and capabilities—something that they have conceived in their imaginations (if they have been led, and not instructed), something that owes its very existence to them, and something that has been born as the result of their own efforts and intentions : *that* gives a deep, though almost unperceived, satisfaction. It is the satisfaction of the 'maker,' the artist, which awakens the confidence of the young and aspiring creator in himself, and perhaps his confidence in life itself. When this happens we can say that education has come to life, and that this step forward has made possible still further progress in complete and integrated growth.

There is one other result of this kind of enlightened and stimulating work, which we have already touched on, but which curiously enough seems to have been neglected by the advocates of 'Play-Ways' and 'Creative Teaching.' When pupils are thoroughly interested in what they are doing, and are deeply engaged in the absorbing and exacting task of turning out some presentable publication, with their feelings of pride and responsibility deeply committed in

¹ SUSAN ISAACS. *Psychological Aspects of Child Development.*

carrying through the undertaking, it is *then* that we can demand a higher standard of correctness, of neatness and of all-round excellence. It is *then* that the pupils will respond to more exacting demands, even for more formal excellence in the bare mechanics of language. It is then that they can take up the challenge of extra pressure, because they want to see a fine polish on their work, and so they will take the greatest pains in spelling, punctuation and hand-writing. They then see the need, and they find pleasure in doing careful work and in working hard. It is natural, sensible, and, what is more, *rational* to call for extra care in polishing productions of this kind ; but where is the inner necessity for correctness, or for any care at all, when the results will go to increase the blaze of the staff-room fire ?

The nature of any activity should bring its own compulsion, and when the teacher is freed from niggling jobs, his thought and energies can be exerted in more profitable ways. Correctness in the mechanics of language is very largely a matter of careful attention, far more than is often realized. The facts can be displayed to a class in a very short time, but the necessary care and attention can be given by many children *only* when there is a natural and innate driving force. Furthermore, always to insist on correctness is a wasteful expenditure of effort, for constant insistence weakens in its effect with repetition—no one can keep at the peak of effort habitually, and children soon learn the defensive measure of paying no attention to the over-emphatic, or the droning, voice. Contrary to the common view, the way to success in teaching is not to make the work very easy, but to increase the demands, and to raise the standard when the circumstances warrant it, that is to say, when a class is alive to a challenge and when

enthusiasm proves they are ready and capable of undertaking difficult and exacting tasks—and extreme carefulness is an exacting task for very many children. Did not Pestalozzi say : “ Point out the way to a good that the child can see to be difficult, though he must also see it to be not impossible ” ? And Coleridge : “ It cannot but be injurious to the human mind never to be called into effort.”¹

These deeper educational principles have suffered neglect in their application to actual class-room practice and in the exposition of methods of teaching ‘ subjects.’ How difficult it is for professional educationists, and especially for administrators, to be aware always that education in school occurs only when productive relationships exist between pupil and teacher, and between pupil and pupil ! And how easy it is to forget that “ The Principles and Philosophy of Education ” work only through pupil *activity*—re-action, response and expression in the class-room, through the medium of school subjects, and in school societies and pupil undertakings ! How difficult it is, too, for the teacher of English, with his eye all too frequently on mistakes and failures of expression, to see that when a project or any other piece of productive work is undertaken by a class, the writing will come, if all has gone well, as a completion of a cycle of constructive activities ! First there will be a dawning idea and initial conception, an imagined plan, and a presentation of ideas orally, and then, if the projected production is felt to be worth while, the writing comes as a fulfilment of the pupils’ imagined conceptions, and satisfies their hopes and intentions ; and the better the final production in content as well as in finish, the more valuable will that fulfilment and satisfaction be to them. But as so much school work cannot be brought to a satisfying

¹ *The Friend. Essay III, 1818.*

conclusion, it is all the more necessary for teachers to seize every possible opportunity for giving support to undertakings that can and should be completed, for this completing of a cycle of endeavour has a special and unique educational value.

Very many of our pupils in school to-day, especially those who are quickly responsive but without much staying power, particularly need the experience of carrying out to a finish the various tasks and projects that they have initiated ; and those experiences can be attained only in activities which arouse their enthusiasm and energies. And only when children find satisfaction in writing, and can perceive the successful expression of what they have been conscious of, or partly conscious of, can they learn to take a delight in words and in the elusive craft of writing.

The curriculum should be humane and realistic, unencumbered by the dead wood of a formal tradition, quickened by enquiry and experiment, and inspired . . . by a vivid appreciation of the needs and possibilities of the children themselves.

J. DEWEY. *The Child and the Curriculum.*

. . . in proportion as interest grows more disciplined and concentrated, thought becomes more vigorous and more definitely purposive. . . .

Purpose, interest, desire, emotion, satisfaction, are more essential to thinking than steam is to a steam-engine.

F. C. S. SCHILLER. *Studies in Humanism.*

Chapter 7

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES : INTEREST

There can be no mental development without interest.
A. N. WHITEHEAD. *The Aims of Education.*

Very many secondary school pupils can handle their mother tongue satisfactorily enough for all routine and every-day purposes, but they never make further progress. The reason for this usually is that they have no true interest in the subjects that they have to write about. Unfortunately the word 'interest' in pedagogic circles has become a quasi-technical term, so that it is bandied about too often ; but attention and interest are vital impulses that are biologically important ; for 'interest' is in the nature of *a personal participation*, real or imagined, in persons and events, past, present or future, and in reasoning and other mental activities. And as is well known, personal participation excites motives, emotions, associations and other memories, each of which, if imbued with strong enough life, is accompanied or represented by its own particular words ; so too "merchants and lovers, cooks and tailors, have words wherewithal to despatch their ordinary affairs."¹ Indeed, if we tap any of the activities of consciousness we shall stimulate the verbal activities of the mind and will. But writing on dull subjects, though it may teach 'correct' writing, will never teach anything more than a superficial handling of words. If our pupils are to be taught to express facts, opinions and ideas with exactness and point, with

¹ J. LOCKE. *Essay on the Human Understanding.*

liveliness and conviction, they must write about subjects which not only engage their interest, but which call on their full powers of intellect and imagination.

What a difference it would make to rates of learning if every teacher took to heart Cicero's warning: "Above all, the dry-as-dust teacher is to be avoided not less than a dry soil void of all moisture for plants that are still tender."¹ If only the educational world could attack dullness more virulently! Because if pupils do not find interest in their work, they will not put forth any real effort, for they *cannot*, except under external pressure. And if effort is not put into work there can be no learning, no improvement; because progress in handling language cannot take place without effort—it is difficult enough to ensure progress even with effort. The teaching of the mother tongue, perhaps more than any other school subject, requires the teacher to be inventive and stimulating, though to have some of these qualities in only a small degree is usually sufficient. This is partly why teaching English is so attractive, and why it is a fit subject to teach for those who have sensitive and active minds.

Then, "a subject must never be dry or barren—the Sahara, for instance," as a young teacher once wrote. But it is not essential to try to find original or exciting subjects for a class to write about. It is often a mistake to think that that is vital to the work. It is usually sufficient to select topics about which a good deal is known, if possible intimately known, by our pupils, especially if these topics are concrete and realistic, with a close relation to their lives. Some teachers with a taste for the bizarre or the unexpected, rely on subjects quite beyond the bounds of possibility to stimulate their pupils' expressive powers. The

¹ *De Orat.* ii. 26.

well-worn subject : "What would you do if you had a thousand pounds?" is a mild example of their subjects. "I grow twelve feet in one night," or "The Arrival of Inhabitants from Mars," or "The Death Ray" is the kind of thing which is called 'imaginative,' and which is thought to be necessary 'to train the imagination.' But though subjects of this type may be included occasionally, they are not really essential. Effective imaginative work can be done on a simpler, more practical level. The point to remember is that any subject that requires the elements of past experience to be re-arranged, or viewed in a new setting, can make a simple demand on the writer's imagination if the imagining is exact in detail and vivid. Even the most practical and realistic subject often calls for some imaginative effort during the writing, though not, of course, a fully creative effort. But for a few children, "the most ordinary movement in the world, such as sitting down at a table and pulling the inkstand towards one, may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments, now bright, now dim, hanging and bobbing and dipping and flaunting, like the underlinen of a family of fourteen on a line in a gale of wind."¹

Before leaving the subject of imaginative writing, we should note that everyday topics and scientific matters may demand an imaginative effort just as much as unrealistic or fictitious subjects ; indeed the actual facts concerning the working of the universe and all its diversity and intricacy, including human affairs, often make a greater demand on our imaginative abilities ; for they need more precision of mind and expression, a more complex use of inter-related imagery and a greater knowledge of intricate things and processes than the fictions that children usually make up or read ; for these are selective, and can ignore the restrictions

¹ VIRGINIA WOOLF. *Orlando*.

of time, cause and effect, logic and reason. We should note, too, that the commonest modes of imagining are : the repetitive, which recalls selectively what has passed through the mind, consciously and unconsciously, and the creative, which reconstructs and re-forms those same past experiences, producing what is virtually a new experience. But we should not assume that one of these modes is more valuable than the other : that would be an unwarranted judgment. The truth of the matter is that the two modes are inseparable, and should be thought of apart only in order to clarify our understanding of two facets of one mental act ; the repetitive is the foundation of the creative, and makes the creative possible in all expression work, for it feeds it and gives precision and ' truth ' to it. Whatever the medium, if we stimulate the one, the other will participate without further action on the teacher's part.

To return to the choice of subject : it is one of the main concerns of the teacher to foster an interest in the outside world of things, events and in all the activities of living beings ; and for two reasons. First, because the mastery of language and the mastery of knowledge go together : with each increase in understanding and clear grasp of fact there can be a similar increase in language, if the need and the opportunity to use language occurs at the same time as the step forward in knowledge and grasp of fact, in other words : " There has to be organized in the boy the language of his inner life, so that the language may grow with the life, and the life may grow with the language." ¹

Secondly, by fostering wide interests a skilful teacher can lead pupils to make their own choice of subjects, and therefore to engage their minds with what concerns them

¹ S. S. LAURIE. *Lectures on Language and Linguistic Method in the School.*

intimately. Many classes form the habit of relying on a teacher for subjects to write on, and the result of this is that their teacher then becomes convinced that his pupils cannot make their own choice, and do not want to. But this is a poor state of affairs. Just as each child's experience will, to a greater or less degree, be different, so will his language and interests. Thus for the proper development of the minds and personalities of a class of children, it is essential to foster their individual choice, their individual interests, and also each one's special ways of treating the subjects of their compositions. Therefore all that can be done to encourage children to think out subjects for themselves, to select their own plan out of a number of possible ways of handling a topic, and to concentrate on what particularly interests them, must take pride of place in the teaching. The choice of subject and the line of attack must be personal, especially as much of the thought and fact to be expressed by the children cannot be original or fresh, but must inevitably be some kind of repetition of what has been heard or read.

. . . by reading and meditation, *and a very close inspection of life*, he had accumulated a great fund of miscellaneous knowledge, which, by a peculiar promptitude of mind, was ever ready at his call, and which he had constantly accustomed himself to clothe in the most apt and energetic expression (my italics).

BOSWELL. *The Life of Dr. Johnson*, 1791.

Chapter 8

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES : AIMS

In order that a thing be rightly directed to a due end, it is necessary that one know the end itself, and the means to that end.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS.

We come now to the fourth major principle ; but in considering it we must be critical, for the expression of it in a verbal tag may result in superficial acceptance ; and an uncritical acceptance of principle will not ensure application in practice. It may be expressed quite simply in this way : that if the pupils' written work is to improve, the teacher must have a definite objective in his teaching. He is courting failure if the aim he has decided upon is no more precise than to teach his pupils to write well, or to write good essays or ' good ' English. These aims are quite useless as they are too general and too simplified. For language is an intricate and an intimate activity of the mind and body, and its roots, springing from the same sources as our conscious impulses and cognitive activities, are fed by the same unconscious urges. Simplicity is, indeed, one way of achieving clarity, but the quality and essence of a subject will escape us, and an estimate of its value too, if simplicity in the expression of it is secured at the expense of completeness and precision.

A general directive to a teacher of English, then, could be formulated in this way : that he is concerned at first not so much with teaching his pupils to write good essays, letters, *précis* and the like, as with developing their language

skills, so that language will become a reliable and effective medium for their mental life and for all its various forms of activity in which language would be appropriate. But as language cannot be divorced from the pupil's whole life and from his personal modes of thinking and behaving, the teacher in practice may take as his objective the developing of his pupils' minds and characters. For if he fosters the activities of his pupils' minds, promotes the widening and deepening of their experience, stimulates, for instance, their interest in drama, music, reading, school societies, etc., he will effectively, though indirectly, be developing their linguistic abilities.

In addition to his definite plan of training his pupils to use language and of stimulating their general interests, a teacher needs to have some more detailed and particular objectives in mind when he is planning a course for each set of pupils. And he will find his teaching probably more effective if he interests his classes in these more limited and more strictly focused aims, for when even quite young children know where they are going, they work with more confidence in what they are doing.

The general lay-out of the whole composition course will become clearer if we think not only of the general objective of developing skill in language, but also of the differing uses to which language is put. This gives us our more precise direction and its necessary definition. Our objective then becomes more particular : the giving of practice and training in making use of language for various purposes. So that our pupils, besides acquiring a greater mastery over their mother tongue, and besides acquiring a more extensive vocabulary, and a greater command of its normal structures and patterns, will also be learning how to make the language that they have at their disposal carry out the various tasks

that language can undertake : tasks, for instance, such as explaining, giving reasons, describing, instructing, persuading, discussing, giving evidence, and so on.

There are two facets to the problem : there is the acquisition of new linguistic elements, and there is the more skilful employment of the language already acquired by the pupil, during his pre-school years and outside his composition work. Most of our pupils require careful training in order to develop their ability to make the best use of the language that they already have at their disposal, and to make the best use of it in all of the varied activities which call for some use of language ; for instance, in the taking of notes at a meeting, summarizing the chief events of a football season, writing editorials, reporting a discussion, recording decisions of a committee, explaining a scientific process, composing various kinds of letter—request, business, personal, acceptances, notice of meetings, etc. All these have their particular techniques that should be learnt.

But most of the pupils below the top ten in any class need to find out through trial and study (with the help of the teacher's questions, directions and criticisms) how to make good use of the language at their command, and how to make effective use of their language in the conduct of everyday social life. Pupils in their second and third year soon learn to make use of language effectively and appropriately when differences are brought to light through comparisons and accurately defined tasks, and when these tasks are made concrete and realistic, and especially when they are planned as if they were in a dramatic setting.

There is another way of framing objectives for the teaching of composition ; it is one that strongly recommends itself to those who understand the deeper purposes of

education, and who believe that the dominant factor in deciding objectives, methods and in selecting material for school purposes, should be the needs of the pupil. It is a wise educationist who realizes that if we fulfil the present and immediate needs of our pupils, we shall be giving them a training which will enable them to deal adequately with the tasks and contingencies of the future. The objective for these teachers might be to fulfil the needs of their pupils as far as fulfilment in language is possible. And one great need of the pupil is the need to express himself—to express all that he becomes conscious of and all that catches his attention. As Piaget puts it: “The mere fact of telling one’s thought, of telling it to others, or of keeping silence and telling it only to oneself, must be of enormous importance to the fundamental structure and functioning of thought in general, and of child logic in particular.”¹ Now the need to express himself should not be restricted deprecatingly to his opinions and ideas, as some of the opponents of ‘self-expression’ crudely regard it. The needs of our pupils to express themselves with some degree of completeness and of clearness are undoubtedly urgent, and they are very pressing if there is to be continued progress in learning, in a mastery of skills and in the full development of the powers of the mind, body and spirit. If, for instance, expression is adequate to an occasion and to the quality of an experience, language enables us to be distinctly aware of that experience, of its precise qualities, its true nature and its value. And all this special and expressed awareness enables us to understand what is going on in relation to ourselves, and consequently enables us to act with more appropriateness and success. The further need for the mastery of the craft of language for all purposes, with its

¹ *The Language and Thought of the Child.*

result of gains in confidence and the stimulus of success has already been touched on.

As previously stated, the immediate aims should be discussed with the class, for the value of an aim lies to no small extent in the writers' striving directly and consciously to achieve it. For instance, most children in the second and third years of a secondary school are capable of finding out how a piece of flat description may be made clear-cut and with highlights, or how to describe a scene or a person so that the general impression stands out with firm outline, and the dominating features with sharp details. A descriptive task of that kind provides its own clearly defined objective.

A task for a more senior class may be 'How to give point and significance to dialogue in narrative and play-writing so that this dialogue carries the action along, or reveals the characters' attitudes and states of mind, or so that it describes and informs, at the same time remaining natural and lively.' That would be a suitable task for the more gifted classes; such classes would be able to work for objectives such as 'How to make skilful use of details, examples, authorities, illustrations,' 'How to get various *effects*,' 'How to suit the word to the theme,' 'How to shape or mould the development of an argument or exposition,' 'How to ensure a close sequence,' 'How to present a series of happenings in various ways—objectively, subjectively, as a participant, or as an eye-witness.' These classes can be given different types of ineffective writing, and can be set to attack the problem of making each piece interesting, or less 'toothless.' This kind of task should be faced in this way: "How is it done?—What are the ways in which this particular piece of writing may be made more forcible, or more vivid?" Limited aims of this type give the writers a clear view of the nature of the task, and what is expected of them; and when they

have finished, they can see whether or no they have found a solution to the problem. The certainty that a sharply focused task gives, and the stimulus of a hurdle to be surmounted as well as the encouragement of success which often quickly follows, will secure the attention and co-operation of a class, and will stimulate zest and enjoyment in the work.

The first and principal point sought in every Language is that we may express the meaning of our mindes aptlie each to other ; next, that we may do it readily without great ado ; then fully, so as others may thoroughlie conceive us ; and, last of all, handsomely, that those to whom we speak may take pleasure in hearing us. . . .

RICHARD CAREW. *The Excellency of the English Tongue.* 1595-6 ? (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith).

Chapter 9

SUBSIDIARY PRINCIPLES : RESPONSIBILITY

It is by teaching that we teach ourselves, by relating that we observe, by affirming that we examine, by showing that we look, by writing that we think, by pumping that we draw water into the well.

AMIEL. *Journal.*

We pass now to the three subsidiary principles : that the pupils' personal responsibility for their own writing should be developed, that positive encouragement is needed to foster confidence, and that, for success, constant practice is essential.

It is customary in schools for teachers to be responsible for planning work, for setting written tasks, and for correcting and assessing work done. This may not be the best policy in a Composition Course, for it is obvious that if pupils feel no personal responsibility for plans and corrections, they cannot naturally give so much care and thought to their work, or learn so much from their efforts, as they would if they had to rely on themselves. If pupils are given responsibility for planning, correcting and assessing their own work, they take a personal interest in whatever is going forward, and their ideas about their writing become active and more critical ; they then think more about standards, and about ways of carrying out their tasks, and so they begin to form their own standards and ideals for what they produce ; and what is more, they begin to show some concern for neatness and spelling. To be given

responsibility is most stimulating to children ; and we should constantly endeavour to develop in them a feeling of pride and personal concern for what they write and make ; by so doing we ensure at a blow a certain degree of care and correctness. Otherwise the pupil may argue to himself : " Why should I bother ? If the teacher makes all the corrections, let him. I needn't take pains to be careful."

But pupils soon realize that the more mistakes they make, the more they will have to correct ! There is then some hope of their being more careful. How often do we miss success because we aim at formal excellence in the belief that this will profit a pupil, when we should have recognized the deeper issues which require us to rely on our pupils' finer qualities of character, on his sense of responsibility, his hopes for success, his generous response when much is demanded of him, and on his natural wish to do good work !

The main point is that we ought to develop, not only a linguistic conscience in our pupils, but also an awareness of what is good and bad ; an awareness, for instance, of the quality of their own writing and of good writing. This would be of lasting value all through their lives. In the middle school or even lower, the children should be able to judge the success or failure of a set task. This would lead to a development of pride in their productions. By throwing the burden on the class for corrections and assessment of standard, we give our pupils a better training than they would have if all the responsibility for these things were on the teacher.

It can quite easily be done : the class can gradually take over much of the correcting ; the pupils may be asked simply to polish up their spelling before they hand in their work ; then next time they may be asked to find how many mistakes they have made ; then they may change books

and see how many have been missed. On the next occasion similar treatment may be given to punctuation ; at another time they may be required to indicate the best passages in their own essays, then the worst ; at another time still they may have to underline all the words which have peculiar force or richness or vividness, or words which do *not* contribute to a paragraph ; or they could underline the most striking phrases or sentences, or the most futile or vague. Time has to be given—five minutes is enough—for polishing or for going through their own work. By constantly varying the attack, by constantly pitting each pupil's efforts against *his own* previous efforts, and by driving the class continually towards taking more and more responsibility for finding errors, failures, and successful expression too, we gradually can train our pupils in self-criticism, and develop eventually a personal interest and ambition in producing work that they can be proud of. By making each pupil always aware of the issue, of the task or problem to be attacked, we can train his judgment, and his ability to note the quality of his writing. It is impossible to do such a thing by instructing, by studying examples, by giving injunctions and explanations, or by "Do this" and "Do that."

In the training in self-criticism it is necessary, of course, to give some help in the learning of the techniques of correcting. Children have to learn that spelling can be checked quite efficiently by running the eye quickly along the lines, but that for the efficient checking of punctuation one must read the lines over to oneself, preferably aloud. One must note if the sense is clear or not, and if the sentences run into one another or not. One must see that each distinct unit of meaning is separated from the next by a stop of some kind, and kept from spilling its meaning on to the

edges of the next unit. Punctuation has little usually to do with the need for taking breath when reading aloud. Its main purpose is to keep the meaning of words, phrases and clauses from relating themselves to adjacent meanings which, for clear thought, should be kept separate. Its secondary purpose is to indicate changes of direction in thought, subordination of associated ideas, modifications, and so on ; for it is a system of signs to help understanding and to guide the reader's thought.

It does not appear to be generally recognized that secondary school pupils between twelve and fifteen have gradually to acquire the habit of looking at their own work objectively, or that help usually is needed for them to acquire this habit. Too often this aspect of the composition course is left to look after itself, and the pupils who need help do not receive it. We have to foster the child's *interest* in dealing with the more mechanical side of expression, and gradually train him to undertake more difficult tasks in which his judgment and selective abilities are called into play. The reason why this is particularly difficult for him (as it is often for us too) is that he has to exercise these powers on his own writing, which is perceived by him at the time of writing to be the only way in which he *could* have expressed those ideas and facts. So he must have help in making use of the technique of applying criteria.

Nothing so impresses the human mind as the evidence given by some pragmatic test. A class can be told : " You are to write directions for a stranger to find the lending library, Post Office and the Police Station of this town. When you have finished, each pupil will draw a sketch-map from his neighbour's directions. In this way we will test whether each boy's directions are (i) clear, and (ii) correct, for we all know this town." The test is applied, and each pupil

finds out for himself the effectiveness of his work by the response of his neighbour to it. This kind of thing trains the pupils to estimate the success of their own writing. Many kinds of description can be tested by drawing, even if the drawer has little skill. Similarly we can make use of deduction as a test to prove to a writer that he has succeeded—or failed ; and we can train him, too, to test his own descriptions : “ I see—the church is there, and there’s the river, and the hills beyond. Then if I stood on the tower of the church I should see the river, except where it runs behind this mill and those houses and trees. Is that right ? ”—“ That’s right, sir. That’s where the millpond is.” This proves to the writer that he has succeeded in describing the lay-out of the physical features of the landscape.

The application of a simple and practical test can become an accepted part of the composition work ; and then the pupils will soon learn to carry out a definite intention or to achieve a known end ; but its chief value in the long run is to develop their critical powers and sense of standard. And the application of simple criteria such as : “ Does this passage pass the test or not ? ” is also an effective stimulus to effort. To propose the test : “ Is it interesting ? ” may be sufficient for younger children ; but it is too general, and perhaps too exacting for much of their work. It is better to restrict a test for these pupils to such a one as : “ Do you want to go on reading ? ”—“ Does the explanation help you to understand the working of the machine, say, a sewing-machine, a dynamo, a cream-maker—or not ? ” In describing a process, or complicated machinery, we can ask : “ Is every step in the working of the machine accounted for ? ” In the presentation of an argument we propose : “ Are the points put forward in support of, or against the

motion, strong ones, or are they common-place or unconvincing?" In the handling of a quasi-judicial case: "Is the evidence to the point and is it complete, or is it insufficient to prove your case?"

We have always to remember that, though much of the school work may be humdrum, it is important to be ever aware of the wider issues, and to seek always to engage the pupils' deeper-seated and maturing abilities. But to regard the teaching of composition as a training in examination hurdling, is to court the results of such a materialistic outlook, for children, even quite young ones, very soon realize that something vital is lacking, and if they find nothing fine or deep to respond to, they have nothing to help them and so they fail to make good progress. If we really want success it is essential to aim high; and in all expression work, whatever the medium—music, paint, wood, dance or drum—it is greatly rewarding if there is always a lively concern for the training of a critical judgment, a regard for standards, a sense of values, and independence of mind. The suggestion here is not that one should concentrate on this kind of training in the lower and middle school, but that it should be brought in whenever possible, provided that it does not confuse the main aim.

Unfortunately, much of what actually goes on in a classroom requires an unswerving dependence on the teacher; whereas *education* calls for growth of personal judgment and of individual skill, and as the pupil slowly matures an increase of self-reliance. Most of what a pupil acquires in school will be temporary, and in the mastering of it, he is dependent on an adult; but, the learning that is to be a permanent possession can be acquired only through the exercise of his *own* powers, not merely those of understanding and remembering; and a sense of values

is one of the most important of these in the process of learning.

Language must be left to grow in precision, completeness, and unity, as minds grow in clearness, comprehensiveness, and sympathy.

GEORGE ELIOT. *Leaves from a Note-Book.*

Chapter 10

SUBSIDIARY PRINCIPLES : CONFIDENCE

Whatever the child does gladly, whatever brings him credit, whatever helps him to realize his greatest hopes, whatever rouses his powers and enables him to say with truth I can—these things he wills.

PESTALOZZI.

It is often thought that in order to teach pupils to write clearly, to spell and punctuate correctly, and to write what is loosely called 'good grammar,' all that is necessary is to draw attention to errors. For the weaker pupils the effect of this is damaging and discouraging. Did not the great Ben Jonson say : " No more would I tell a green writer all his faults, lest I should make him grieve and faint, and at last despair " ? ¹

Some rueful teachers might say : " Would that we could get any response, even fainting or despair ! " Nevertheless emphasis on every error is suited perhaps only to the really able pupils ; it is not the best thing for the poor writers. Often we are all too apt to accept procedures in teaching that are good for a section of our classes, but that are unsuited to those pupils who specially need help and wise guidance ; yet we often apply these procedures to everyone indiscriminately. There are the pupils who, term after term, always receive adverse remarks for their written work ; these children give up hoping, and therefore *are not able* to put forth all their efforts ; because without hope of

¹ *Timber or Discoveries*, 1640-1.

success, and without belief in their ability to achieve an end, they cannot give the attention and the exact care that are absolutely essential for progress in learning to write. These less able pupils cannot apply themselves to exact detail, for they have nothing to help them to focus their attention, and so they are often quite incapable of achieving formal excellence, or anything like it. The reason is that the will to achieve what appears to them to be very difficult has been drained out of them by continual depreciation and condemnation. And we ourselves must beware of forming habits of mind that bring discouragement to our pupils, for "experience in literature and life has shown that the minds which are predominantly didactic, are deficient in sympathetic emotion. A man who is perpetually thinking in monitory apothegms, who has an intermittent flux of rebuke, can have little energy left for simple feeling."¹

We are reminded, too, in Longinus' *On the Sublime* that "Whatever men do is always inevitably regarded from the worse side: faults make an ineradicable impression, but beauties soon slip from our memory."

So the way to initiate the progress of the less able pupils is to change the tactics entirely, in fact to reverse them. To commend, and not condemn, is the secret. In practice this will be seen to have surprising results, for these pupils need encouragement so much that when they find that they can sometimes succeed, they strive with unwonted keenness, and then their work patently improves. Then, in the degree that their work improves, the demands for more neatness and correctness may, and should, be increased. *This* time these children can respond to more exacting tasks, for they have become aware that *some* success is within their reach.

¹ GEORGE ELIOT. *Essays. The Poet Young.*

One of the chief reasons for the low performance of unskilled learners is that they have poor powers of perseverance ; they *cannot* maintain care and attention for long, so it is most necessary for them to be given continual encouragement. Praise is the stimulating tonic they need : " I assure you, there is no such whetstone, to sharpen a good witte and encourage a will to learning, as is praise." ¹

We know, too, that it is true of ourselves that praise is a heady tonic and will encourage a will to learn. Indeed, encouragement for the less able pupils often does *more* than instruction and example ; and praise should be generous, though it must also be directed closely to the improvement shown, because compliments for general improvement usually have little effect. It is far more telling if a vivid word, or a clear-cut explanation, or a convincing argument is commented on favourably ; but for the weakest this is not always possible. For each of these pupils improvement on his own previous work must be looked for, and demonstrated by a comparison, the old with his new work. That will impress him convincingly.

However effective praise is for concrete instances like these, there is nothing so convincing for a child as the unaided discovery that some success has been achieved ; if we can secure this we shall have done a great deal for our pupils. It can be done by a training in self-criticism and by the use of simple criteria. Similarly, when a pupil sees the effect of his own writing on an adult, and notes the response that records his success, he becomes convinced, and *then* begins to stride forward in confidence. And that gives him the interest and will to learn more. That is where educational practice often fails : it does not strike deep

¹ ROGER ASCHAM. *The Scholemaster*. (Written 1563-8. First edition 1570.)

enough. The real sources of endeavour and will in learning and achievement are not material ends—marks, prizes, examination passes, self-display—but are self-confidence, hope, enthusiasm and the striving for ideals.

There was something encouraging in Alexander Petrovitch's very reproof, something which said: "Forward! Rise quickly as possible to your feet, without heeding your fall!"

NIKOLAI V. GOGOL. *Dead Souls*. 1837. English translation, 1887.

Unless the pupils are continually sustained by the evocation of interest, the acquirement of technique, and the excitement of success, they can never make progress, and will certainly lose heart.

A. N. WHITEHEAD. *The Aims of Education*.

Chapter 11

SUBSIDIARY PRINCIPLES : PRACTICE

The secret lies in the use of the pen ; whatever the form, whether prose or verse, or whatever the theme, write, write, and again write.

ERASMUS. *De Ratione Studii.*

Finally, the principle that practice itself will achieve something should receive recognition. As we are concerned here with the mastery of language, we are not teaching something that is merely to be known—to be learnt by rote and memorized for repetition. We are dealing with a form of expression, with the carrying out of an activity—with a skill. Consequently our pupils can learn *only* by becoming active in the using of language. We see therefore that for progress to be made the pupils must exercise their abilities. No instruction, example or explanation can effect anything, unless practice follows. What has been heard or noted must be *applied*, if the writer is to become more adept. But it is not so extremely urgent for the able pupils to have constant practice, for these usually write without difficulty, and it is an easy task for them to set down what they have in mind. But for the less skilful ones regular and frequent practice is essential.

The business of physically manipulating pen or pencil is trying for the weakest pupils, and very many of those who have no more than average linguistic abilities find it difficult to complete a long continuous piece of writing, unless their interests and feelings are fully engaged. It is therefore necessary for many pupils to have practice simply to get

them in the vein for writing, and writing is so much a matter of habit that we ought not to make the exercise of it a special thing or unaccustomed task. To master the mechanics of language one must write a little every day ; for instance, it is an excellent plan to get children into the habit of using a rough notebook, just as a painter makes use of his sketch book—' to keep his hand in ' and to try out some detail of colour, light and shade or form of what he has seen or imagined.

Frequent practice develops a freer use of words and language patterns, for it is through constant purposeful usage that words become ' readily available.' Our passive vocabulary is always greater than our active vocabulary ; so that usage is needed to draw those inert words into active play in our thinking and expressing.

Much practice is necessary, too, for gaining a command of such skills as punctuating and paragraphing, and a pupil must gain some command of the simple techniques if he is to progress. His written work in other subjects then will not be spoilt by his inability to express what he has heard. For his inability to express himself may be caused by an undue pre-occupation with the mechanical details of writing. Practice, then, may help to free him from this pre-occupation so that he can give his full attention to the content of his subject and what he wants to express.

But in planning the year's work for a class the teacher need not include in his syllabus frequent practice of every detail of form and expression, because, in the handling of a variety of subjects one after another, especially when the writing is done for a variety of purposes, a good deal of literary technique is made use of, and the accepted formal details are mastered in the course of tackling the various forms of language.

There is yet another virtue in copious practice : by much writing we become interested in ideas, in words and possibly in problems of expression. When this stage is reached, progress will be greatly accelerated.

It might appear that daily journalism would be a better means than daily teaching of increasing the fertility of thought.

GRAHAM WALLAS. *The Art of Thought*.

The choice and command of language is the fruit of exercise.

GIBBON.

Chapter 12

OBJECTIVES

The best language is strong and expressive, without stiffness or affectation ; short and concise, without being either obscure or ambiguous ; and easy and flowing and disengaged, without one undetermined or superfluous word.

LAUNCELOT TEMPLE. *Sketches or Essays on Various Subjects.* c. 1760.

We have emphasized the necessity for all teachers of the mother tongue to formulate for themselves an end in view for each exercise and written task that they set, that is to say, what they hope to achieve by it, and what improvement in the use of language they expect to promote. This does not mean that the objective chosen should always be strictly limited and narrowly focused. In the first few years of the school course general aims should often predominate ; but later when improvement and some fair success have been achieved, objectives should be pointed more directly at specific needs.

At first, then, the aim may be general, and should be directed towards fostering right attitudes towards spoken and written expression. For it is essential, especially with pupils of poor ability, to try to get them to enjoy writing, for, if they are half-hearted at the beginning, the wheels of progress may be clogged throughout the course. But enjoyment is not to be fostered as an end in itself ; it should be pursued *so that* it may rouse the interest of the class and sustain their efforts. Its underlying purpose is to spur, to

quicken response, to stimulate language abilities, and to catch and hold attention so that heavier demands can be made on the writers—demands for neater and more correct work. Without the pupils' readiness to try, it is doubtful whether they can be taught very much, and certainly not how to write better, for as Plato reminds us in the *Republic*: "Knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold upon the mind." And to learn to write well one must *work*; few learn to write well without effort; and for a child to form the habit of giving attention to the art and mechanics of expression, he needs the urge of interest, purpose and pleasure.

The next general objective to be chosen should be to promote ease and fluency in speech and writing. To learn to write, one must write; to master the spoken word, one must speak. But how very often the greater part of the time in a lesson is taken up by the teacher explaining, instructing, admonishing—in fact, by what he looks upon as 'teaching'! And how often have inspectors and training-college tutors said to themselves: "Oh, stop talking and let them get on with it!" or in blunter terms: "Cut the cackle and get to the hosses!" Indeed, the success of a written composition lesson can often be estimated by the eagerness of the children to write; and the training that they often need most is writing with the stimulus of keen readiness and enjoyment. So teachers should ever keep in mind that writing as well as speaking is a skill and an art; and therefore to acquire facility we must practise: indeed some success can be assured for most of us and for nearly all our pupils by practice.

Then, if teachers of languages themselves wrote at least occasionally, they would improve their understanding of the innate problems of expression; they would realize,

for instance, that to write well one must be in the vein for writing : then when the words and ideas are flowing easily and spontaneously, the writer is able to mould the phrases and structures into more effective and expressive forms. Does not good writing result when we have so mastered the art of pouring out our thoughts and feelings on paper that we have mental energy and attention left over to weigh, alter and improve as we write ? But to start our pupils improving their linguistic expression before it is properly born—as it comes out of the cocoon of their young minds, unformed, unfledged and, at times, but half conceived—is to strangle or maim it as it is making its first struggling efforts to conform to an adult standard.

So in teaching young children, we must foster the activity of writing, and encourage a free and untrammelled expression of what is in their minds : the habit of writing then may grow. But if we stem it with injunctions (" Be careful of spelling ") and impede it with obstacles (" Write nicely ! "), the art and skill of writing may never be mastered. And later, too, if we put down embargoes on muddled thought or incorrect grammar, these will damp down the ardour of the young writer, and will deflect his mind from its proper direction, which should be focused on the subject, and not, *at first*, on language ; for the result of being deflected from what is being thought out is that the mind is confronted with two problems, and so becomes confused. On the other hand, set a spark to the flame, and the young mind will be ready with a rush of ideas, and then the words will rise to catch the thought and light it up in consciousness. And then as each thought or budding idea is seen sharp and clear by the writer in the light of such words as he has, he can perceive what the next thought will be—brought into being by its forerunner—and so the next one follows, the

power of association and reason being so strong. In this way connected thought is born. Frequent experience of this kind of eager expression, without attention to correctness, will do much to train the child gradually to master the two facets of expression: clear thinking and a command of language.

The general aim at first, then, must be to get the pupil to write, and to write copiously. In this we follow the well-known advice of Quintilian: "Let that age be daring, invent much, and delight in what it invents, though it be often not sufficiently severe and correct. The remedy for exuberance is easy; barrenness is incurable by any labour. I like what is produced to be extremely copious, profuse even beyond the limits of propriety."¹

And if our pupils make many mistakes, that is natural, and need not cause anxiety. Many of these childish mistakes will not persist, for as the pupil achieves more and more command over the instrument, he will gradually learn the conventions of writing—spelling, punctuating, legibility—provided good standards are customary in the school. He may not learn all the conventions completely, but if he finds pleasure in writing freely and purposively, little extra pressure will be needed to produce gradually more and more correctness in his writing. If we endeavour to develop a pupil's confidence in his own powers to manage this troublesome art of writing with some success, it will be found easy to lead him to achieve greater correctness. It is vastly more important to help a pupil to get confidence in his ability to do something than to try to teach him to do that faultlessly. The one may lead to mastery of the instrument, the other to sterility.

When once we have secured a lively willingness to write,

¹ *Institutio Oratoria*. Lib. II. Cap. IV. (A.D. 90-92)

our next aim should be to improve the quality of that writing. But are we to drive for more formal excellence or for greater expressiveness, or for more exactness in thought and language? Which is the right objective to strive for? The way to look at it is something like this : need there be an antithesis between quality and correctness? If we think that correctness is all important, we have then been led astray into thinking that language is something one does in order to learn correctness. But what is the natural purpose of language? It is to communicate with others and to carry out the many needs and purposes of life ; so that correctness obviously is not essential, though the accepted conventions must be obeyed within certain limits. But to make correctness a major objective, and to transform it into a rod to beat the pupils with is to frustrate one's own efforts and set the children against active and willing participation. And this would be fatal, as only keen attention and interest can call into play that quickened perception of small detail that is essential for producing ' good ' writing. Our pupils cannot naturally be interested in formal correctness and mechanical perfection at an early age, so that constant insistence on these things too early will obscure the end that our pupils should consciously be striving towards. Nevertheless the drive for correctness must go on all along the line, though it may often be little in evidence. The plan should be to exert gradually more and more gentle pressure on the class to get correctness attended to : by example, by encouragement, by advice, by giving more and more practice in polishing written work, and especially by throwing more and more responsibility on each writer for producing work of a high standard. Above all, the stimulus of having to produce some magazine or other publication for public view will unconsciously impress on the pupils

the real need for more correctness. But as was once said by a trainer of teachers : " One of the most maddening things about some teachers is the way they grind the faces of their pupils in language mechanics without ever letting them realize that there is some sense and purpose in these things—about as sensible as trying to teach someone to drive a car by feeding him on sparking plugs."

If a class feels no responsibility for producing good work, and sees no reason for taking pains with it, how can the pupils ever learn the necessary habits of accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation ? Adherence to the conventions of language is largely a matter of habit. We form these habits by taking care with small details ; to do this most pupils need some reasonable incentive. Verbal castigation will serve, but more intelligent methods are used by those who foster the craftsman's pride in good work, and who find satisfaction in their pupils' progressive development in skill and understanding.

In these matters of suitability of method to a particular class and of selection of material, we have always to remind ourselves that we are dealing with immature minds and with undeveloped organisms which have not complete control of all their powers and abilities. And therefore what we think they ought to learn, or ought to do, may by no means be the best things for them *at that stage*. Their unpractised powers may not be ready for learning or doing what we have decided they must attempt. The determining factor should be the readiness of their abilities and skill to take on a task. For example, pupils who in their first year have been given grammar lessons, but who have had no practice in applying rules of grammatical correctness, cannot be expected always to use a plural verb after a plural subject. The ability to write with grammatical correctness needs

much more than a knowledge of some grammatical facts ; it requires an attitude of mind and certain intelligent habits, which include an awareness of meaning and an awareness of language as manipulative material. Many children in their first two years in a secondary school cannot possibly acquire these habits and this attitude, and so it is quite useless teaching them grammar at that stage for the purpose of enabling them to write grammatically correct sentences. Some children, of course, learn to speak and write their mother tongue with grammatical correctness, through imitation of good example, and through correction when they were first learning to speak ; but we cannot secure that now in England, though the children of some peoples in Africa, with a complete ignorance of ' textbook grammar,' speak with an astonishing correctness, and they do this in a very highly inflected language. Let us not forget that large numbers of children in secondary schools to-day have at the ages of eleven and twelve no distinct awareness that words may be considered objectively, and that what a word means to one person is not always exactly the same for everyone else ; they have not profited from Humpty Dumpty's : " When *I* use a word, it means just what *I* choose it to mean—neither more nor less," not understanding that that is, by and large, sound linguistics, as we can see from R. G. Collingwood's lively and convincing description : " The proper meaning of a word . . . is never something upon which the word sits perched like a gull on a stone ; it is something over which the word hovers like a gull over a ship's stern. Trying to fix the proper meaning in our minds is like coaxing the gull to settle in the rigging." ¹

The next aim that we are to consider is : how to get some

¹ *The Principles of Art.*

quality in the writing. The qualities of 'colour' (or concrete sense impressions), vividness and energy have been selected here, but there may be others more desirable. If so, they will no doubt receive attention ; no special plea is being put forward for the three we are now to consider.

Our pupils will be writing their stories, descriptions, etc., with their minds set on action, event, character and thing ; but they will not have realized that without much trouble they could make their scenes, people and happenings appear much more alive to their listeners or readers. Most pupils will not be aware that a writer may have to *find* the words which will make the character or scene stand out sharply in imagination. However vividly their own imagined characters and scenes are *to them*, they usually use the first words that come to mind, and often the most banal or generalized ones appear first—for these are always 'on tap' and they do not realize that these do not by any means truly represent, or express exactly, what they themselves are imagining precisely. Their attention has to be drawn to the flatness and watery quality of their descriptive words ; the outlines of their roughly sketched-in scenes are often clear enough, but the rest of their imagined pictures are usually in a verbal flat-wash. The thing to do then is to ask each pupil to say which is supposed to be the figure or feature that is to stand out. On reading through their own writings they will often find that nothing has been given prominence ; then they have to decide what is to be in the foreground and what in the background—the decision of course must be theirs. Next, they have to be encouraged to find some of the more insipid words in their own writings, to discuss what words shall replace these, and then to estimate the new effect. Or one might instead take into the classroom some brightly coloured crayon or water-colour sketches and

also some landscapes in flat washes, and promote some discussion of these, then calling for suggestions of richly coloured words to describe the scenes and people in the pictures more vividly. Or this first step might consist of energetic questioning, in order to press the pupils' imaginations to picture their chosen 'subjects' more distinctly and with richer colours ; for some of the feeble descriptions are likely to be the result of feeble imagining. This last way may be the soundest, because the best training in the mother tongue is that in which expression in words comes to fulfil some felt need, rather than to satisfy some external standard or demand.

This step is to encourage our pupils to see their writing as a medium of expression which can be enriched and 'toned up' to produce a fine or telling effect ; but our object here is not to get a *precise* handling of colourful words or a sharp distinctness of picture. The aim here is to promote richness and boldness in the handling of description. For this is the stage in which children should splash about with poster paints, so that they may discover the delight of playing with brilliant, royal colours, and of seeing what rich, striking effects can be achieved—and achieved by them.

In this first stage we have not yet reached the point of promoting good writing, for this is the time for developing interest and pleasure in writing, for helping our pupils to acquire confidence in their powers, and for them to find out that language may be manipulated and then moulded to produce various vivid and exciting effects. So that it is not merely interest in writing that is to be fostered, but also interest in doing things *with* language. Teachers of art and music understand the need and the value of expression work of this kind, and often achieve marked success. The

changes that they have made in their teaching methods and theories are remarkable ; but teachers of English have not yet made anything like the same progress. Children's natural interests need more consideration, and what they are capable of, as well as the nature of ' expression,' instead of an undeviating drive for formal neatness and correctness in the first two years of their pupils' secondary education. The main drive, of course, should be to stimulate the natural and fundamental impulses of linguistic expression, for " the first approach to any subject in school, if thought is to be aroused and not words acquired, should be as unscholastic as possible." ¹

Set down diligently your thoughts as they rise, in the first words that occur, and, when you have matter, you will readily give it form ; nor, perhaps, will this method be always necessary ; for, by habit, your thoughts and diction will flow together.

BOSWELL. *The Life of Dr. Johnson.*

¹ J. DEWEY. *The Principles of Education.*

Chapter 13

METHOD—THE PREPARATION STAGE

The first requisite in the Master, a gentle and sympathetic manner, the second a knowledge of wise and attractive Methods.

ERASMUS.

In deciding on 'Method,' one must be wary of rigidity and dependence on routine. Sometimes it is better to experiment, and by trial and error to find out what a particular class responds to, and what opening gambit is the most effective. Indeed, it may be best just to start the class writing, without preamble or planned method, simply to find out the more urgent needs of the majority of the pupils. It is highly desirable, if it is possible, to find out these needs, and then to let the fulfilling of them determine the steps of the method. On the other hand, it may be better to start off with a series of planned lessons, even if these do not especially fit in with the work that a class has been doing ; and to determine the needs of that class from the way the new tasks are tackled. The succeeding lessons then can be more directly aimed at supplying these needs, or can be adapted gradually to them. But whatever may be said about the planning of a composition course, 'Method' should be regarded as a series of varied activities, each one growing out of the previous one. Method therefore must not provide a stiff framework, restricting the lesson and the free pursuing of obviously profitable lines of interest and experiment. 'Method' must be handled essentially as a developing

process, changing as the focus of need or interest shifts, or as the work grows in scope or diversity.

There are three good principles of method : (i) written expression should always (or nearly always) be preceded by some oral preparation ; (ii) concentrate on subject matter, letting the language at first look after itself ; (iii) use the rough draft to point to improvement in language and ' form.' The theories underlying these principles are : that children should not be called upon to write ' in cold blood ' ; that good writing depends upon clear thinking, precise imagining, and the distinct awareness of remembered experience ; that one should not try to start off with correctness and nicely moulded sentences, with well-planned outlines, that is, not with the technique of writing ; but should strive to work on the children's minds so that they think hard and precisely about their subject, so that they imagine their story vividly and keenly, and so that they feel confident that what they have in mind is not only capable of being expressed, but is worth expressing.

Thus, contrary to accepted theory, the teaching of composition must concern itself at first very largely with subject matter, and not with manner. Skill in writing, both the mechanics and the fuller mastery of the art, can be acquired gradually. It is therefore quite mistaken to set out from the beginning with the sole determination to inculcate ' good ' writing in the first two years of a secondary school course. It is sounder to keep this aim before us as the objective of the English teaching at the top of the school. Appropriate aims for each year will help to achieve this end, though it might well be the general ideal throughout the school course.

The essential steps in method are : first decide on the purpose of the writing ; next plan the procedure that will

be carried out by the teacher and pupils in the class-room ; and finally arrange, if possible, for some way of making use of the pupils' writing. Some of the likely difficulties may be prepared for and perhaps avoided, if the teacher runs through the procedure in his mind beforehand and views the likely reactions of the class imaginatively. The first stage of the lesson, or of a series of lessons, will almost always be some kind of preparation. Those who write without much cudgelling of brains require as a rule little preparation ; though this is not to say that more careful planning of what they are going to write would not result in better work. But those who write without facility nearly always need a thorough preparation of their subject ; it is perhaps impossible to stress too strongly the importance of this. As Mr. R. W. Brown says in his sound and practical handling of the subject of writing a mother tongue : " If they are to write well, their minds must pass through a long period of preparation." ¹

More help can be given in this part of the lesson to those pupils who need help than in the rest of the work ; and we may be sure that correcting grammar, spelling and punctuation does not give to the unskilful pupil the help that he badly needs. As will be seen later, when the deeper purposes of preparation are discussed, the purpose of this part of the lesson is not merely to help the pupil to collect his thoughts and facts about his subject and to arrange them in some kind of order ; it is to give him some training in the organization of his material and in thinking about a subject in constructive and comparatively precise ways. The Preparation Stage of the lesson, therefore, should be given a major rôle.

For those who do not express themselves easily, or who

¹ *How the French Boy Learns to Write.*

have little to say, the preparation stage is especially necessary because their minds require livening up. These children fail to make progress with their writing because they cannot see the possibilities of a subject that they have chosen (or have been given), and they have not that facility, that often comes to voracious readers, of following a line of thought which opens up new vistas for them as they go along, and as they become aware of each new possibility. For those who have plenty of ideas, and can begin writing without any hesitation, the preparation is useful because their ideas are often too haphazardly related, as these are usually poured out with too little regard for what is important and what unimportant, their proposals coming pell-mell without any kind of selection, so that sometimes there are too many possibilities for the young writers to deal with. These children need to pause and view their material as a whole, so that some kind of organization of it may suggest to them the main lines of their presentation.

We should, no doubt, look upon preparation as one of the best means of sharpening the pupil's linguistic abilities and for accelerating his progress in using language, rather than merely as a stage in a teaching method aimed at helping him to win success in the weekly task of a school syllabus. It may help us to see more clearly the effect that well directed preparation may have on our pupils' command of language if the linguistic process is analysed more carefully.

First, we must realize that unless some thing, event, or other cause of an impression on the mind, is perceived clearly enough to arrest attention, the mind's reaction is nearly always comparatively slight. The linguistic reaction therefore is also slight, and no increase of verbal activity, or precision of word-usage, results—or can result. The converse is true: the more vividly a thing or event is

thought of, imagined, or in some other way held in the focus of attention, the quicker in response and the more appropriate will be the words to express that thing or event. Therefore, if we can get our pupils to attend closely to some facet or detail of a subject, and to focus their minds on that for a time, we shall be helping them to express that part of the subject in words. Merely by helping them to *attend* to a subject by means of our questions and interest, we are helping their reluctant passive vocabulary to obey the calls made upon it ; thus the words that are rarely used, or which have been met with only in reading become more readily available for expression ; they become active through having responded to an urgent call. One value therefore of preparation is to help the pupil's words to become more obedient to demands for expression.

The very pressure of a need or wish to communicate excites the linguistic reactions of most people, and for some the act of writing is sufficient to stir words to activity and ready obedience. For those lucky ones language is, as Locke expressed it, "the great conduit whereby men convey their discoveries, reasonings, and knowledge from one to another."¹ But for the less able linguistically, much more is needed to awaken an unpractised and sluggish vocabulary ; these less responsive minds require the stimulus of an enquiry, and the need to reply to questions, and possibly the wish to take part in the work of a group, or to assert themselves, before words outside their verbal 'small change' and accustomed forms of expression will become active, or at least active enough to break through into speech, or to flow freely enough in writing. These unloquacious pupils will profit greatly from the general give-and-take discussion of the classroom during the

¹ *Essay on the Human Understanding.*

preparation stage, for here and there a word or an idea will strike a spark of recognition and remembrance in their slow minds, and then the pervading dullness and obscurity will be lit up, and expression made possible. On the other hand an intelligent pupil's recollection and re-viewing of his knowledge and experience will stimulate his expressive powers.

These recollections and recognitions of experience all have their verbal expression, even if the words expressing them are not actually spoken or clearly recalled, so that something is gained for all who take part or find some interest in the discussion ; and not the least part of this gain is the arousing of words in the minds of those who are listening or contributing. The knowledge and experience that is gathered from individuals, and so shared by the whole class, may be a potent stimulus to verbal activity, and, we must note, often an incitement to appropriate verbal activity.

For the best pupils the discussion period is a testing time for their words, ideas and expression, and it provides for the poorer ones both new experience and active expression : these play on their minds and understanding, and also on their language habits. In the classroom there are incentives to attend to these things ; outside there are often fewer ; and it is attention, we repeat, that matters, for without that there may be little, if any, word-activity in the mind. It is this corporate working over the subject, with the impact of many different minds, and with the enlightenment that comes from the differing reactions of minds with varied and differing experience and ways of thinking, that is so valuable, and which is so vitally necessary for all but the very bright intelligences at the top of the class. We have to realize, too, that the effect of a fellow-pupil's expression and experience on the minds of the

listeners is often very different from the effect of the teacher's words and ideas. The effect may go deeper and last longer : one has only to watch the interest, and sometimes the amazement, on the face of a listener in a class, and to note occasionally a sudden far-away look on a child's face, to realize the effect of an impression made by a comrade's frank confession or revealing description.

Similarly, the preparatory period in 'getting up' a subject is a great aid to concentration (that difficult habit for so many pupils). And this concentration is of much value, for the longer we ponder closely on a subject, the richer and more complete will be the building up of the requisite 'body of thought.' And when the mind has conceived a rich body of thought, it is free to concern itself with expression and arrangement, for it is without the burden of having at the same time to delve for 'something to say.' Often the less able pupil has to scratch his head for ideas because he has not had sufficient *time* for them to begin to form and collect in his mind, and for these to call up others that are associated with them. Indeed, we usually underestimate what Spearman called "the lapse of time needed for any mental process to get going at the start." ¹

And so difficult is concentration for the less able child, that he cannot keep his mind from wandering, and then of course his ideas vanish like a shoal of minnows in a shadow. Our less able pupils need training in meditation, in pondering on a subject and in focusing their minds on it, so that they can learn to view its details without losing its main theme, and so that their memories and intellect will relate ideas to it. In other words, they need to *learn* how to think round a subject so that related fact, imagined fiction and experienced

¹ *Creative Mind.*

sensation are recalled ; and they have to learn to concentrate on, and so clarify, this partly-new series of ideas, and thus to enrich and vitalize old lines of thought connected with the subject. These children have to learn *how* to dwell on a subject, how to view each aspect of it, not the whole in perspective, as that is beyond their powers, but the parts in turn, with full attention to relevant points of interest.

It is generally agreed that most children in the schools now cannot have the experience of reading themselves full, and that only too often they are at a loss for ideas when set to write ; but it may not be so widely accepted that the consequence of this lack of ideas is that their thoughts are very often ill expressed, their ideas are unrelated, and their participles, relatives and other connecting words are not clearly linked to antecedents and logical associates ; so that the whole syntactic system of their writing is loose and disjointed. It is then that the teacher supposes that the proper prescription is a grammar lesson, or he complains that : " They don't put verbs in their sentences, and they don't know what a sentence is, and they have been taught grammar badly in the lower forms ! " But children cannot use well constructed sentences and well connected clauses when their thinking makes use only of syntaxless scraps of language, lacking logical sequence. Not more grammar, but more *focus* is what is needed—focus on the topic, and on the experience, situation or event that is to be recorded. It is essential to investigate in order to cure, and instead of looking at surface symptoms, which might suggest temporary alleviations, we must search for the root cause.

But there is more yet in this matter of preparation for writing ; it is not just a question of the quantity of ideas and of activity of mind. We have to understand also that

the less able pupils are incapable, without guidance, of *organizing* their material : their facts, ideas, information, opinions. Their material is too often diffuse and unrelated ; many details are seen, but not an orderly pattern of thought. In fact, to see their own writing as the expression of an orderly pattern of thought cannot come to most of them until the end of the course. These pupils need to be trained first to arrange their facts and details, to fill them out and give them an orderly connection, paragraph by paragraph, with some of the sentences at least in logical relation with one another. This result would be a highly skilled achievement for many children, for it needs a grasp of the central theme and an ability to relate subsidiary details rationally to the main theme ; but something must be done to help the weaker pupils, though the training is a long undertaking and must not be started too late. As before, the way to begin is to encourage a closer examination of the details, and to institute enquiries which will help to focus attention on the various aspects of the subject. By viewing the parts and noting how they are related, and by tracing out the connections, the class will begin to see an organized pattern appearing. When one arrangement has been perceived, another will usually suggest itself to someone in the class, and this may lead on to the discovery by someone else of yet another form of arrangement. As these possibilities are recorded on the board, a discussion of their relative value can take place, and the problem is solved. The ability that the less able pupils lack is the ability to perceive relations, and to follow up connections that are but dimly perceived ; but this ability can be acquired by the majority, for the human mind's natural activity is the perception of relations : " Thought penetrates to the nature of things and expresses realities and the relationships of

realities.”¹ It is this perception of relations that forms the basis of the ability to organize and to re-arrange ideas so that order and proportion will result. Hence the true training in ‘composition’ consists of promoting attention to aspects of a subject, and in commending (or by other means fostering) the discovery of connections and relations, and finally in urging to further efforts and attempts until some dominant themes begin to dawn in the pupils’ minds.

We might go further in this matter: the more we concentrate on the whole, the more the whole will be conceived in an ordered and organized ‘Form,’ for it is by looking at the whole and then attending to its parts, and to the relations of each part to the whole, as well as to each other, that we become aware of the central theme binding all together. And directly we have perceived *that*, the subordination of the parts should appear, and with this subordination will appear also the proportion of the parts in their due order. It is only by attending to the whole, and by finding the continuity and the clear connections of every part to the whole, that we can perceive how to shape the whole with due proportion and strict coherence. To perceive the relatedness of the parts to a whole is an intellectual operation, and so our pupils will need training in order to apprehend their material with such completeness and concentration that its inner relations, proportions and development become perceptible to them. The ‘form’ therefore of a composition should rise out of the *composer’s* conception of his subject, and not as the result of a jig-saw puzzle, or of an attempt to turn an Aristotelian deduction into an instruction: ‘a beginning, a middle and an end’ is too crude a description of the segments of a good composition.

¹ H. O. TAYLOR. *The Mediaeval Mind*.

The teacher's part, therefore, is to give a training in *how* to set about composing, and especially in finding profitable and significant ways of apprehending a subject : not merely thinking about it (that is the initial step), and not merely thinking round the subject (that is only the second step) ; but in holding in mind the complete material that has been compiled ready for writing. The mind of the young writer needs to *work over* the field he has de-limited, from his notes, from diagrams, sketches and what he can remember. Before writing, he should 'brood over' what he has gathered. He has to learn to do this, though the habit may not be formed until he is in his last school year.

We may glance here at another valuable purpose served by good preparation : it is the teacher's great opportunity for developing his pupils' individual interests. By adroit question, by showing interest in a pupil's special bent, and by explicit persuasion and encouragement of his pupils to follow any line of thought and enquiry that attracts them ; a teacher can promote different ways of handling a subject, and differing conceptions of it, too, and so give due weight to the varied experience, knowledge and personalities of the pupils in the class. This is so important for his own interest in the work, and in the diverse modes of the development of his pupils, and still more important for the inner stimulus and progress in education of each of his pupils, that the whole intelligence, understanding and social sense of the teacher will be called into play, if he is not to let slip by the quickly vanishing moment when he can help, and if he is to finger each stop lightly enough to call forth some single pure notes without disturbing the general concord. This is what Plato felt to be so valuable, for he said : " You must train your children to their studies in a playful manner

and without any air of constraint, with the further object of discerning more readily the natural bent of their respective characters.”¹

Although all these values are important, there is one which is always over-riding: the immediate value of preparation for writing a composition is that it helps the pupils to think themselves full, to think of so much to write about that they feel they must get some of it down on paper. Preparation should help them to feel the urgency of what they have to say so strongly that they are impelled to express in words what they have discovered. So it is the teacher's exacting task to teach his pupils how to build up in consciousness a full and rich conception of their subject: how to fill their minds with facts and information and opinion and ideas so that expression, whether in speech or writing, comes easily and without hindrance. For to write, a man must be full, like a mug of ale, and just slopping over. It is an ideal lesson when there is a general desire to write, because the field has been clearly envisaged, the details known and because words come flowing from a full mind: “What is it that makes Tommy write five pages more quickly than his technical skill can justify? What but enthusiasm and the eager inspiration of actually having something to say.”²

Seldom have I written that in a day, the acquisition or investigation of which had not cost me the previous labour of a month.

S. T. COLERIDGE. *Biographia Literaria*.

¹ *The Republic*. Book VII.

² H. BLAMIRE. *English in Education*.

Chapter 14

METHOD—TYPES OF PREPARATION

There is a period of aimless activity and unregulated accumulation. . . . There is a period of orderliness, of circumspection, of discipline, in which we purify, separate, define, select, arrange.

S. T. COLERIDGE. *The Friend*. Sect. 2.

It may be profitable to run over some of the ways in which preparation for writing can be carried out. Naturally, all the possibilities for this kind of work cannot be dealt with adequately here, and a mere list, even with commentary, cannot do much, for often in properly developing composition courses the type of preparation appropriate to the subject will be determined by previous work ; and so a discussion of further alternatives or possibilities would be unprofitable. However, in some sections of any sound composition course new tasks will be introduced that have not evolved from previous work, so then a choice is necessary.

The use of pictures for preparing the more junior classes for writing does not seem to be as popular as it might be. This unpopularity may be caused by a lack of the right kind of picture, for a careful selection needs to be made, and the right kind of picture is not always easy to come by, or ready at hand when needed. The right kind should normally be rich in detail, but with pronounced central figure or focus of interest ; if of natural objects it should be of first-rate quality, and if of mechanical subjects it should be informative and complete, and above all clear. In short, a picture should give ample opportunity for describing and

explaining, and it should stimulate ideas. It is no doubt best not to use great works of art for this purpose, as this might well stimulate wrong responses to works of art ; for already too many people are looking at pictures without making aesthetic responses to them. There are other cogent reasons why works of art are not the best material for our purposes here : paintings that are works of art have been composed and painted for the eye and the imagination, to arrest our sense of colour, to direct and control our perceptive powers by harmonies of plane and light and line, and by their interplay of form and design. Their prime purpose is not to express some ' literary ' subject (as a rule), or to give rise to imaginings of events or to subjects possibly better expressed in words. For similar reasons it is better not to use good poems as groundwork for children's writing.

Again, the use of films and film-strips, shown to children in class, has not been developed as extensively as one might have expected from the general wide interest in films. The strips and films made by geographers, scientists (especially biologists), and possibly by historians, could be used with good effect, as most of these films and strips have a clear central theme and sufficiently clear detail, and some of them are interesting.

Films, however, need to be presented with an intelligent understanding of their usefulness. A likely mistake, for instance, is to demand no more than an expression in words of what has been seen (many films not admitting of much more than this) without further imaginative or intellectual effort ; but a reproduction of the same content in a different medium—words instead of photographs—is only a translation ; and translation without any purpose or effort, or indeed any necessity, must fail in stimulus and effectiveness. For language exercises, such as an exercise revealing the

value of an appropriate choice of words, or merely to give practice in the choice of words, most films and film-strips would be good enough. But when the aim is to develop the more deeply seated linguistic abilities, the choice of film needs to be made with insight and imagination ; one has to consider the content of the film, and the mode of its presentation of that content. We are not dealing here, of course, with writing *about* films, with such subjects as the art of the film, the success or failure of the adaptation of novels to film scripts, camera work, and subjects of that nature, all of which are of more interest to the upper school.

It has long been customary to make an ' expedition ' or ' school visit ' an occasion for a piece of composition. This kind of thing, thrust on the children without sympathetic understanding of children's reactions and pleasures, is likely to promote the writing of stiff and disjointed compositions. But with skilful planning and wise guidance, visits and expeditions can be fruitful in producing good expression work ; though it is often better not to use this source unless the writing can be made purposeful or entertaining, or can provide a stepping-stone to further investigations and discoveries. Whatever plan is devised, there should be some form of preparation, such as questioning, discussion, project-planning. The actual expedition or visit is only part of the preparation, as there should be some discussion before the event, as well as after it, especially for classes of slow writers. Expeditions and visits can make a most valuable contribution to a composition course when the whole series of preparations, planning and visit is thought out as a minor, or even as a major, project.

The one objection to ' projects ' that many teachers of English often raise is that the hack-work that they hold is necessary for learning to write one's mother tongue is never

tackled when all the pupils' written work is bound up with a Project. There are two points to be dealt with here : first, it should be obvious that what is to be learnt by the so-called 'hack-work' could be better dealt with when the children write up their accounts and the results of their project than in almost any other way ; for *there* it would arise out of the necessity to produce a thoroughly presentable report, history or summary of the project. The children would then not only pay more attention to instruction on the more mechanical features of writing, but they might even ask for some instruction on them, and then the mechanics could be insisted on with more justification and reason than is usual.

The second point is that it is the responsibility of the teacher of English to see that there is a place in the Project Plan for varied written work. Indeed, the Project method of co-ordinating the curriculum of the junior classes presents an admirable opportunity for introducing different types of writing ; and the project itself provides a stimulating and satisfying reason for writing ; with the result that the writers are likely to go to the task with greater willingness and more determination to work with care than they usually give to the average unrelated and motiveless school exercise, which provokes little thought and stirs no ambition or expressiveness.

It might help if we ran over some of the possible forms of writing that might be part of a Project : for instance, the initial plan, whether worked out by staff or pupils, might be used as a practical example of planning, and to illustrate to a class how the subordinate parts may be related to the main idea or intention, and how these must be arranged in proper order, and kept separate from parallel or complementary undertakings. Out of this, with a Middle School

class, might arise a very instructive and enlightening discussion on the dominant theme, on the proportions of the integral parts, and on the problem of securing unity and balance.

Next, there is the useful training in 'note-taking' to be included, which inspiring teachers seem to fight shy of, though they are the very ones who could make the work interesting and provocative. Much profit would accrue, especially to the more energetic pupils and those likely to go on to 'higher education' later, if some instruction on note-taking were given; a Project would be just the right occasion for this, when the pupils are all agog to carry out their tasks and responsibilities in as workmanlike a manner as possible. Here again, the class can be made to face the problem of 'proportion' and 'relevance'; and as these problems involve the conception of a central theme, the more difficult ideas of 'Form' and 'Design' can be discussed and applied to the actual plan that is going to be carried out. These, then, will not remain in the abstract as theoretical and externally determining features of an ideally conceived design.

When work is planned on lines such as these, the children begin to regard their undertaking, and the account of it, as an organized and co-ordinated series of tasks. They are therefore having some experience of shaping and developing their own work, their own working procedures and their own attack on a complex problem. To feel strongly that they are taking part in a well co-ordinated effort, that they are joining forces with many others to tackle a job that by themselves would be too difficult, and to realize that each person and group must make a useful contribution to the working out of the whole plan in order to achieve success, is in itself an educative experience. This is the kind of planning in education that is vital for the development of

the children's minds and personalities, and is not merely directed to the improvement of their intellectual skill with words.

When one contemplates the value of this kind of experience for children, one cannot but wonder why some teachers spend so much effort and care in 'ramming home' mechanical rules, definitions, explanations, instead of setting the children to tackle real problems in the production of stories, plays, magazines, bulletins or progress reports on 'Project' work or descriptive accounts of the full Project.

Similarly with a Project, other forms of writing can be undertaken ; these too, then, can be worked with reference to some practical necessity ; the writing of summaries, for instance, might come in the plan. As some of the class will usually have compiled facts and details in too plentiful supply, these collections can form the material for an introduction to Précis. The children are then in a much better position to judge whether a detail is important or not, because the main theme, or the aspect of the problem they are working on, is already clear to them ; and therefore they have the true criterion for weighing up the relevance and the contribution of each fact to this theme or aspect. Skill in deciding on the retention or discarding of factual details is therefore acquired from the beginning of précis work. This is the kind of introduction to précis that ensures later success, even with the less able pupils. Furthermore, each pupil can always have in mind the effectiveness of his final version, and its usefulness to the complete record or report ; and so he can then judge whether his facts and descriptions are suitable or not ; and therefore he receives some simple training in criticism.

A Project of ample proportions will also furnish occasion for narrative, as a history of the planning and progress could

be written up ; the official 'recorders,' secretaries or historians can be selected from those who were able to write good narratives when all the class have been tried out with that kind of writing. There will also be frequent occasions when newspaper reportage can be attempted, when description will be required, when explanations of processes or of machinery or of other types of operation may have to be included in the final account ; in fact, almost every kind of writing that is useful will be needed in the complete plan, and the purpose of each type and its place in the full report will be clear to the children. This alone will ensure a considerable measure of success in coherence, choice of words, and clarity of thought and expression.

Another interesting type of preparation is to couple together two methods of collecting ideas. For instance, first there might be a discussion on the subject and the main lines of attack ; then planning how material shall be collected, and who shall be given the various tasks of collecting information, pictures, sketches, diagrams, etc. Then the class may be let loose in the library, or reference books may be given out, or the class may be encouraged to go to the public library and to tap other sources of information ; finally in a later lesson the results of the pupils' enquiries and investigations may be pooled, discussed and re-organized ready for the full report or magazine article. If the method of securing information includes an interview of the local postmaster, the police superintendent, doctor, baker, carpenter, the results are likely to be surprising ; and probably the accounts of the pupils' experiences during these interviews will provide more than ample material for oral work, for narrative, character-sketches and dialogue ; in addition, these experiences can be picked up again later for other treatment after the project proper is completed. It

is in this way that a sound composition course develops, and, what is more, a satisfactory continuity results, without the dragging in of some topics unnaturally.

It hardly needs pointing out again that these 'Projects' and 'Play-ways' are not advocated for the purpose of coating the astringent pill, or of using them as allurements to trap the reluctant insect. They are an essential part of methods that are specially suitable for young pupils, and are recommended expressly for the purpose of helping the pupil to give sustained and whole-hearted effort to his work, and to engage his full attention and will so that all his powers are called into operation, and they are to help him to *work*—to work hard and with persistence, for most of our pupils need really effective help for this purpose. This kind of programme is also recommended because: "activity is the only educative process, and all teaching must be judged by the extent to which it induces vital activity on the part of the child."¹

Delight doth prick men forward to the attaining of knowledge.
THOMAS NASH. *The Anatomie of Absurditie*. 1589. (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith.)

¹ KENNETH RICHMOND. *Education in England*.

Chapter 15

METHOD—"ATTEND TO THE SUBJECT"

I cannot write without a body of Thought.

COLERIDGE. 1794.

By the time some of the possibilities of their task and of their subject have been reviewed in classroom discussion, most of the children should have chosen the lines of thought and treatment that they are going to pursue. When a class is considering the possibilities of a subject it is best to keep each of these possibilities in separate note form—on the board, or in note-books ; then these will be handy for each child to go through and select the particular lines that he is especially interested in ; and the more fertile minds may perceive from these notes some other aspect of the subject not yet suggested by anyone, and these can then follow their individual bents. When from time to time this procedure is followed, it will be found that responsive pupils soon discover that their own individual lines of enquiry, or a new presentation of a subject, is more interesting to them than those suggested by the class, and often just as productive. This is one of the occasions on which individual differences can be catered for, and the personal interests of the pupils encouraged. The effect that it has on those pupils who have failed to respond to general class discussion is sometimes most astonishing, and often most satisfying to a teacher.

If Coleridge found that he could not write 'without a body of Thought,' our pupils should not be called upon to do so. So they need, more than an adult, this period of preparation in which the subject is worked up, and the field

of their experience and knowledge explored. Then it is that they can see the different aspects of the subject, and the extent of the material that might be included. Until a compilation of the facts and details of the subject has been made by the class working orally together, or in groups, or individually, it is usually unprofitable to insist on a closely connected development of the subject, or any kind of organization of diverse material ; consequently it would be better to postpone the use of outlines and plans before they write until the children are old enough to be interested in the different effects resulting from different kinds of arrangement of the material.

Nevertheless it might be worth while to use the collecting technique with young children in order to stimulate them to think round their subject, and to use their collected ideas and facts in class discussion, without expecting them to organize the details too strictly. At any rate, after the first year some kind of training in collecting and compiling facts and ideas should normally be undertaken. Children of this age are very ready to make collections of all sorts, and find a quick interest in adding to their lists of engine-names, aircraft types, stamps, car-makes. A lesson can profitably be given up to the discussion of the possible sources of information, such as relatives, newspapers, periodicals, libraries. Various members of the class will then usually volunteer to make themselves responsible for one or more of the agreed-upon sources. The pride in having responsibility, and the interest in accepting some unaccustomed duty, will provide sufficient stimulus for this kind of work ; and in doing it the children are being trained in the getting-up of a subject. Also, by being responsible for contributing a quota to the general fund of information, they are learning to work together at intellectual tasks.

In this work, too, it is advisable not to press at once for a logical arrangement of the material the children have collected. It requires patience, of course, to wait until the children themselves see that some orderly arrangement is necessary, and it needs restraint to let them insist on the kind of arrangement that they themselves have suggested, especially when illogicalities abound. It is even more exacting, but sound and truly educative, if one tries to focus the pupils' attention on the subject, and then leaves them to perceive that as their compilations grow, and as they turn their collected information over in their minds, the plan of the whole begins to take shape. The teacher may then draw their attention to what has been happening, or they themselves may discover that the 'form' of their work has been growing out of their developing conceptions of it. This result is one of the most important in the teaching of composition, though it is not every teacher who is wise enough to attempt it. This way of training young minds to shape their compositions according to the 'mode' or 'form' in which these are conceived, and not by stretching their immature ideas on the rack of some pre-determined plan or super-imposed framework, always has most fruitful and valuable results, as can well be imagined.

The secret at this stage is to plan procedures which will ensure that the pupils focus their attention on the subject. It has often been said "the children must have something to write about"; but that seems to be futile as well as obvious. What they must have is help in focusing their minds on a subject so that they will think of "something to write about." However poor the speech or the writing of the children may be, it is the task of the teacher to concentrate on this "something to write about"; and the key to the secret is "Attend to the Subject," and let the

writing look after itself! This was the advice that George Gascoigne gave: "I would have you stand most upon the excellencie of your Invention, and sticke not to studie deeply for some fine devise. For that being found, pleasant words will follow well enough and fast enough."¹

So, taking this advice, we should take great pains, especially at first, to help the children to find out as much as they can about their subject, to encourage them to collect facts and sort them, to see their subject as a rich and useful field for enquiry, and to discover the importance and the interest in it. We have to urge them to fill themselves full of their subject, to read themselves replete with precise detail, and to master everything they can about it. Words will come to their aid to deal with all the material collected, and these will supply perceptible sound or sight in the form of the printed or spoken word to order and control the complexity of ideas, opinions, facts, memories, that are piling up on their minds.

If all this may appear rather exaggerated, we might remember that our pupils are at the stage when they ought to get excited about the knowledge they are discovering; and they should be finding out for themselves that there are almost endless possibilities in a subject or topic, and should be feeling the delight, and perhaps sometimes the wonder, that they themselves are capable of amassing some knowledge of a real and practical nature. How can our pupils ever have any desire for learning unless their early enthusiasms are engaged on some productive work, and are sustained by concrete results and clearly perceived success?

So the first principle of expression (in any medium) is *attend to the subject*. Do not pay attention to the language; do not direct pupils' attention to words and expressions, for

¹ *Certayne Notes of Instruction*. 1575.

"the old adage of the Roman educationist, Quintilian, cannot be mended: 'Seize firmly the matter, words will follow.'"¹ This, it may be noted, goes directly contrary to the accepted practice of starting with letters in the teaching of reading, of teaching grammar to inculcate correctness, and of teaching new words in isolation in order to enlarge vocabulary. The intelligent way is to aim to get the subject thought about, discussed, studied; for the subject has to live vividly and strongly in the minds of the children if progress is to be made. It must be felt by them as something important, and it must be seen by them imaginatively, as a clearly focused and sharply defined reality, and as something necessitating expression. If the subject can come alive in the child's mind in some way approaching this ideal, there will be no need for the teacher to concern himself with language. But though he must give thought to the ways in which his pupils are to prepare themselves for writing, he will do more for them through stimulus and enthusiasm, or simply through his interest, than he can by correcting their mistakes after they have written.

With some composition subjects and with most classes some vigorous, intelligent questioning is often sufficiently helpful to start a class compiling or writing. Searching questions from the teacher on some field in which the children themselves are expert provide a good stimulus to precise work; or a confession of ignorance by the teacher has sometimes a similar effect, though his confession and wish for enlightenment must be sincere. And the lines of the teacher's enquiries will at times reveal to a class the nature of the task, so that questions need to be adequate and apt, if they are to open up the interest as well as the scope

¹ H. WARD and F. ROSCOE. *The Approach to Teaching*.

of the subject. It is more difficult, but more profitable, to train a class to ask the questions. "What questions should be asked when we are investigating the subject of, say, 'Polar Expeditions' or 'Country Dances' or 'Trout Fishing' or 'Making Mince-pies'?" When a class finds that some of their questions lead nowhere, and that others of a different type are really fruitful, the ability to ask the right questions soon develops.

- It is difficult with some classes to have the preparation and questioning done in groups; but it is sounder education, because the children then learn to carry some of the responsibility for their own work and progress. If they learn to work together in small groups, they will have more occasions for speaking, and—a further gain—for speaking with their comrades' approval or disapproval of their ideas and suggestions. This kind of group work, though it may not be so 'finished' or so productive as that carried on with the whole class under the guidance of the teacher, has a compensating value: it trains the pupils in intelligent give-and-take of ideas; it trains them to attend to ideas and to assess these without the direction and the standard of values of an adult, and it fosters the independence of some of the class, as well as giving purposeful practice in oral English.

The usual plan is for the teacher to question the class, getting each pupil to develop his theme in general terms, and then to follow this up by a few simple questions to help the pupils individually, if possible, to get further definition of subject-matter, and clearer oral expression of a few ideas. But this individual work is not entirely satisfactory for good class work, as most young pupils are more interested in their own themes than in those of their fellows; and they should be, for that is the purpose of this part of the work—to

develop individual interests. Consequently in some classes a certain amount of restiveness is to be observed ; this is the sign that the situation is not fulfilling the needs of the class. How is the balance between class and individual work to be proportioned ?

It is, of course, essential to maintain close attention to individuals, but with a large class, or with a class of energetic pupils, some guidance must be given in order that all may find points of interest in the individual work of each member, thus fostering some co-operation among the pupils. If, for instance, a class has to discuss which of the written productions are the best, or the most practical, or the most exciting, or the most unusual, most of the members of the class in making their decisions, will find some interest in the work of their comrades ; this kind of comparative-critical assessment can be carried out during the oral preparation on the suggestions of the class. Other ways of capturing this interest and co-operation can be devised ; for instance a challenge to the class : " Each speaker is to be given five (or ten) suggestions to help him make his article or story more interesting to us, (or more something else)." Or group work may be used, each group being called in to deal with different aspects of the subject, and to make its recommendations about treatment, outline or factual content.

With young and very active pupils it might be better to let them form themselves into editorial boards, each board producing some regular publication of a few pages, such as a wall-newspaper, daily or weekly form or school bulletin or diary. Each group is then called upon to listen to the oral versions of its own members, and to contribute to these only. This limitation of activity and of the pupils' attention always helps to maintain the interest of the members of each group, and it is a good example of the need to limit

the demands made on young pupils, or on pupils who for some reason find it difficult to concentrate, or to find interest in other pupils' activities. By splitting up the range and scope of what they have to attend to, and by limiting that to a narrow field, one gives them the help that they need in order to acquire the habit of keeping attention focused on some happening or action. The point to emphasize is that the demand made on these pupils should not be too great for their immature powers and their quickly-tiring efforts: what they are called upon to do should be within their capabilities and the limits of their attention and perseverance. Pupils without much staying power should be able, not only to succeed, but succeed easily: belief in the possibility of success helps them to attend and to persevere at a task.

As we have said, it is often necessary to stimulate interest in writing, and to aim at getting the children to write with pleasure, rather than aim at some specific end which is intended to improve their handling of the language. Most classes of young children are very willing to embark on some project or activity involving written work, provided the end in view appears reasonable to them. So the plan of running a form magazine may be launched. The plan should be discussed in full, and the various suggestions put forward should be considered, and then logged in the Form Minute Book, which is kept by the Form Secretary. Then the Editorial Staff, contributors, printer, binders, illustrators, etc., are proposed and elected. Usually the number of copies of the magazine crops up, and sometimes a volunteer for duplicating copies comes forward (a volunteer whose father has the necessary jellies, cyclostyle or typewriter) but it is well to be cautious here, and not to be too enthusiastic, as duplicating by the unskilful takes a long time,

and a young boy's eagerness often outruns his perseverance. It is better to persuade a class to be satisfied at first with two copies, which can be passed round. The final form of each issue gives the needed opportunity for a training in the conventions of writing: punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, neatness and legibility. The production of one rough copy and one careful one corrected by the Editors, should be within the powers of almost every class.

Other Projects may be run in a similar way: as a combined effort or by groups, each group producing the same kind of 'Collected Stories' or 'Portraits' or a 'How-to-do-it Anthology.' More ambitious schemes might include 'The Collected Papers of the Local Learned Society'—each group producing the 'papers' of different 'learned societies': aeronautical, marine, archaeological, philatelic. If a class is very alive to the lure of travel and exploration, the collections could be 'Tales of Travel in Many Lands' or 'Travellers' Tales and Diaries,' or better still 'The Last Remains—maps, sketches, note-books—of Famous and of Infamous Explorers.'¹

If we are on the watch for individual interests and special skills, these can be made use of in planning group work and projects, so that those pupils who do not find the work of a group really interesting can be persuaded to start on some undertaking of their own, though for this to be successful they need to have some initiative, and to be sincerely interested in some hobby or topic, otherwise there is no fuel to keep alight the young flame of inspiration and endeavour.

One cannot, of course, merely launch undertakings and form publications, and then expect these to carry everything

¹ For an example compiled by boys of a Grammar School see Appendix C.

along with them. The embryo production has to be 'nursed' by class and teacher, and given care and thought ; discussion and questioning can do much to keep alive the interest. If such things are in vogue, the attractions of a 'show' day on the lines of a 'Parents' Day,' may serve. Exhibitions held at the end of the term, especially after the termly school examinations, or to provide a useful last week programme, are effective, and often can be held by a junior class irrespective of the affairs of the rest of the school. The idea of displaying the term's work is an attractive one for young pupils, it gives a rational argument for the production of correct and neat work, and provides a purpose for ample written compositions. If young children know from the beginning of the term that they are going to produce work for an exhibition, they will put much more effort into their writing, and will enjoy writing more than they often do, not because they are competing to produce the best work, but because there is an adequate end for doing good work.

The compilation of a 'How-to-do-it' volume is usually a very quick stirrer of children's imaginations and linguistic energies. Again, an editor and sub-editor with a small staff of proof-correctors and binders are necessary. The plan is first discussed, and ideas about the make-up of the collection are dealt with ; contributors volunteer and propose the subjects of their articles ; and then the general form of the articles is decided upon, whether illustrations are to be included, etc. The editor and his assistants outline the preface, and contributors choose their collaborators and start on their tasks. At this point the class may need some carefully planned lessons and some practice on (a) description, (b) explanations of a process, (c) how to use examples, accurate detail, etc. The employment of technical terms can then be dealt with, freely illustrated and practised ;

without these the explanation of precise movements (in constructing a model, for instance) and the exact expression of processes cannot usually be achieved. Young pupils often take a fine delight in making play with technical terms and the precise details of machinery, and will give much time and trouble to get meticulous accuracy ; so that this interest may well be encouraged, and also directed towards other aspects of writing, such as punctuation. Thus young pupils would come to the mechanics of writing through wider interests. Another plan for directing attention to precision in the techniques of penmanship and print might be to encourage the use of amateur printing outfits, even if these were crude toys ; and then there would be no need to thrust on the children the mechanics of writing unrelated to any adequate purpose and natural activity.

A more senior class of boys, especially of boys who are beginning to feel themselves to be persons of consequence, will soon be caught by the compilation of 'Character Sketches' which are supposed to come from the criminal dossier of a C.I.D. Each group or individual can take a different type : one is given the assignment of the old lags, a second a gang of sea-smugglers, a third some Texas cattle-stealers, and so on. Of course, the way to describe faces, distinctive features, bearing, stance, etc. must be dealt with ; and when all the 'stock' types appear, they have to be shown up, and improved upon. By such means we get careful and precise work eventually from a class that otherwise would never be bothered to pay attention to accuracy, vividness, or any other quality in writing.

For less 'difficult' classes and for girls, instead of a 'Rogues Gallery,' some collections of portraits as 'My Likes and Dislikes,' 'The Portrait of My Ancestors' might provide the necessary framework for focused

descriptive writing. But the description of characters and personalities is not easy for most children. It might be better to start with descriptions of places, or the compiling of diaries. If these are planned for juniors or middle school forms in a setting other than school life, they will give scope for imaginative excursions into the past or into other lives and situations. The plan then is presented to the class : "Imagine you are keeping a diary of an officer on board the ship that Columbus sailed in," or "Imagine you are keeping the ship's log of some Polar expedition," or "You are keeping the records of the Hudson's Bay Company in the eighteenth century." Collaboration with the teacher of history might produce some first-rate work from a more senior form. There are endless possibilities for compiling chronicles of historical events, diaries and records of geographical expeditions, or of social life in different parts of the world.

Similarly, for pupils with less interest in historical and geographical subjects, and for those whose lives have been limited by habit and environment, the writing of diaries might lead on to a search into the lives and thoughts of great scientists, engineers, writers, and then on to imagined personages ; and perhaps this might lead those pupils on to wider reading, or to play-writing for the radio. Classes of less able pupils might have to start on diaries of the people they themselves see and speak to in their daily lives, for example, a week's diary of an assistant in a large popular store, of a server in a small grocery—with the advantage of being able to describe a variety of people who come to buy, or of a cinema attendant, a porter, a postman or a helper at a Citizen's Advice Bureau. With other forms, the diary of a garage attendant, a police sergeant, a lorry driver, an A.A. scout. There is really ample choice of 'character' :

hawkers, tradesmen, travellers, poachers, farmers, sextons, blacksmiths, gipsies, shipmen of all sorts, barge owners and lock-keepers.

To sum up, the steps in the method are these : first the class investigates the subject, and then decides on a plan of attack, filling in its important details. In the course of this, the class discovers many possibilities of the subject, and so concentrates on the whole subject and its prominent features that these live strongly in the imagination of each pupil, and are felt by him as an absorbing and vivid reality. Thus the subject stands distinctly in the forefront of the minds of the writers with all the interest and immanence of reality. Lastly the pupils have to find the words that catch its essential features—those features that have become prominent during the preliminary investigation—and those words which best express what is in mind are retained for the final version. So we see that these steps in method are somewhat similar to those that the great Ben Jonson recommended : “ First, mind it well, then pen it, then examine it, then amend it, and you may be in the better hope of doing reasonably well.”¹

¹ *Timber.*

Chapter 16

STORY-TELLING AND CHARACTER DRAWING

A man, he observed, should begin to write soon ; for if he waits till his judgment is matured, his inability, through want of practice to express his conceptions, will make the disproportion so great between what he sees, and what he can attain, that he will probably be discouraged from writing at all.

BOSWELL. *The Life of Dr. Johnson.*

We have studied the theories underlying the teaching of composition, the theories underlying the process of building up and ordering the subject to be dealt with, and the theories underlying the production and manipulation of language. Our task now is to examine in some detail the application of these theories in the daily practical work of the classroom. But although the theories and principles have been discussed at length and with considerable completeness, it is not proposed to illustrate their application with such fullness, or throughout a detailed course of written English. This is not really possible, because much of any adequate school course will be planned to meet the needs of the pupils concerned, and because such work is best planned to carry out a teacher's ideas and convictions, his personal conceptions of language, of the art of writing and of the essential nature of education. In view of this, only certain sections of a school syllabus for written English are included here. These may be regarded as examples, or merely as the bony structure of a living entity—the living thing being the

lesson with its full reality of a human activity. These sections, then, are but indications of the kind of active work that might go on, and illustrations of some of the ways of focusing attention of the pupil on language and the content and purpose of language, on experience and the expression of experience, on the word playing its part as a small fragment in some complex concept, and on the design and architecture of a complete piece of writing.

These samples of a course of written English are, however, to be regarded as particular applications of the theories and principles dealt with in the first half of the book. If these theories can be accepted, then these ways of dealing with the work might be tried ; but if other principles are more acceptable, then other ways of handling the work should be planned. As we have emphasized earlier, theory and practice must go together ; and so we ought always to make sure that our practice is really based on the principles we believe in, and not on some others that we happen to have accepted without critical scrutiny, perhaps because they were in vogue during our own school days.

It does not need pointing out that the very beginnings of written work should be extremely simple, but not everyone realizes that these beginnings should be easy of attainment by the dullest pupil in the class. Otherwise a class may soon develop a long 'tail,' which brings its own difficulties and which is hard to get rid of. Often therefore it is necessary to train a class to produce good written work before composition proper is begun ; consequently the first task might be Reproduction.

Imitation is not, in itself, always a despicable habit, but is a natural and unavoidable one for all young human beings and for many adults ; though it is often condemned, especially by the very intelligent. But we are concerned

here with young children, and therefore we need to understand the true nature of children's learning processes. It is evident that in learning, young children, and perhaps all of us, make the fullest use of imitation, especially in the initial stages of acquiring any skill (think of learning to skate, dance, ski, and to handle any of the very varied kinds of implement used in games). We should, therefore, arrange the early work so that advantage is taken of this natural habit; and so the beginning stages of our pupils' work may well include careful practice in the reproduction of simple anecdotes, fables and short stories. It is best to begin with oral reproduction, but with the less lively and the less able, some sort of writing by each pupil is a great help (if they have some facility with a pen or pencil) in promoting continuity and confidence in speaking.

This work, like all language training, requires a clear understanding of its value and purpose. We have to see it, not merely as simple language exercises, but as a way of giving practice in attending to forms and modes of thought and expression that are in advance of the pupils' usual ways of thinking and of using language. By listening to and retelling stories the children are given practice in seeing the characters and the happenings of a story in a way that they themselves would not have thought of, and at the same time they are given the language that expresses what those characters are like and how they behave. So that they have something to imagine and to understand, and at the same time they are given words and sentence patterns to express what they are imagining and thinking about. It is, of course, the story and the people in it and their doings, that are being given expression, and if the story is well told, adequate expression. Therefore stories that are of absorbing interest to the children make the greatest call on

their linguistic responses, and consequently have a strong and stimulating effect on their language abilities.

There is a further value in this kind of work : by providing both content and expression, we are freeing the pupil from the task of racking his brains to find something to say, and also freeing him from the need to scrape up words to express what is shaping itself in his mind. The consequence is that he can then attend solely to the task of speaking or writing a continuous passage, and of remembering 'what comes next.' The purpose of this work therefore is to help him to acquire some fluency and freedom in speaking and writing. This is a great gain, especially as this freedom is freedom from pre-occupations which may be too much for him, and which often curb his speech, making him stilted in utterance, hesitant in manner and unhappy in mind. How can he talk with confidence and competence if he is self-conscious, and his mind is a jumble of ideas? And how can he at this age write with continuity if the path he is trying to follow is beset with the tangled briars of his own confused thoughts? Reproduction of lively, and absorbing short stories will take his mind off himself, and will help the inexpert in language and in 'composition' to achieve, with sufficient practice, that modicum of confidence and self-command that will allow him to make further progress.

The story is first read to the class, but reproduction of it should not usually be called for at once ; that would be suitable for active pupils who can express their ideas freely, and therefore do not need this kind of exercise. We are thinking here of the ones who cannot do that kind of thing. It is easy enough to plan for the able children, for all one needs to do is to push them ahead in activities and exercises that they find satisfaction in doing. Our task here is to find out how we can help the child ungifted in language, or

unpractised. So first we get them to build up the story bit by bit by means of questions about the people and the happenings in the story *just as the reading presented them*—that is important at this stage—and in just the same order, and in exactly the same words, as far as possible. To go outside these words and to demand a free telling of the story in other words is to give the children another kind of exercise, with different values, and one possibly which they are not ready to attempt. Then, as the story is being recalled and retold, first one child picks up the thread and then another, giving back a part of it in its original wording, and a second or third child is questioned when the first has not used the words of the original. In this way the whole story is retold by the class co-operatively, each child contributing his quota ; for the burden of re-telling a complete story must not be thrown on one or even on two or three of these children until ample practice has been given. Even if these less able children can just manage it, we ought to give them plenty of practice with short pieces of a story, because it is our purpose here to *strengthen* confidence, and to exercise the children's abilities before we make demands on them that might bring back earlier hesitations and uneasiness of mind.

In addition to giving ample practice in re-telling, there are many small variations in this work that we can make to stimulate progress by providing tasks which only gradually make demands on the children's efforts and concentration. By insisting on more and more exact reproduction of the original, where at first exactness was not achieved, or even insisted upon, we foster that attention to forms of expression that is so important at this stage. Later, we can slowly increase the length or the complexity of the story, or use stories with fuller vocabularies, and so gradually develop

the capabilities of the children. Then we can vary the opening gambit of the lesson ; for instance, by beginning a serial story to last over two or more lessons, or by getting the children to find and narrate their own stories, or by having a story read aloud by one or more of the class, or by making up stories and getting the children to make up their own.

How long this type of exercise is to be used, and what it should lead on to, must be decided by the teacher, for so much depends, as always, on the standard demanded and the standard achieved, on the liveliness of the attack on a task by teacher and pupils, and on the real needs of the children. It will be seen that when the children are ready to tackle another type of work, the transition will be quite easy and natural : it might pass from exact reproduction to the filling in of additional details, using the original story, if suitable, as the framework, and then adding other happenings ; or in re-telling the story in other words, close to the original at first, and then moving away from it as skill and language improve.

Next we come to a most profitable part of the course for younger pupils : Story-Writing. As Mr. R. T. Lewis says in the introduction to his book *Composition Through Story-Writing*: "All teachers of composition know how the writing of a story appeals to the child. He seizes upon the theme eagerly, and peoples his world with the characters that are going to take him through quires and quires of paper. Ignorant of the difficulties, and eager only to try his fist at the making of a story of his own, he shows an unbridled enthusiasm for the task . . . but the effort is too exacting." This is so undeniably true that it is strange that many teachers do not make use of this form of composition. And if the task is exacting, we should be able to

guide the writers' energies and to help them sufficiently in order to lessen the difficulties of the task so that they can achieve at least partial success. It is possible, as Mr. Lewis has shown, to direct the children's attention and efforts step by step in first constructing a story, then moulding it, and finally in expressing it in full detail. The help that the children need is in pinning down their fancies and impatient imaginations to one stage of the work at a time ; but a poor class needs so much guidance that it would be wrong to launch a story-writing project without carefully planning the initial steps. It is the task of the teacher here to foresee failure and to prevent it.

There are at least three courses to take : an immediate attack—" Shall we write a story ? " or a carefully planned story-writing project, or continuing a story that has evolved out of some other work, for instance, from a description of some characters. If we select the first of these it will require careful direction in order to avoid failure. From " Shall we write a story ? " or if the teacher has been more skilful, from " May we write a story ? ", we go on to ask, " What shall we write about ? " and then usually a number of possibilities are proposed. The next step might be either to allot each of the most popular proposals to a group to work at, or to encourage each individual pupil to choose one of the plans. Some teachers, using this idea, would go ahead and let the difficulties arise ; but when a class first begins to write stories, it is wiser to draw attention to such problems as ' the opening chapter,' ' the first appearance of each character ' and ' the plot.' We can put it to the class : " Is the beginning important ? " Or " Let us study the beginnings of well-known stories to see how it is done." Or " Let everybody write a beginning, and let us choose the best." Or " What is it that makes a story interesting ? "

At each point, questions can direct attention to the essential ingredients, and can help the young writers to see the issues involved.

We can leave the description of the fully planned attack to the book on story-writing, and so pass on to the third proposal, the indirect attack on the same problem, through description of places, scenes or through character-sketches, first of the popular boys' or girls' story type, and then of more freshly imagined personalities. The continuity of the work can be secured by leading up to description of a place in which the different types of person would be likely to live, or for some reason be found there. When we have at last got our characters in their natural setting, we may go on to a discussion of what they might be doing there, and what might happen to them there. And so the plot evolves, the children possibly being unaware that they are building one up. This may spring a surprise on them, for they may suddenly discover that they have made up an entirely new story. This will give them confidence in what they are doing. Results of this kind are nearly always striking: they will guarantee a sustained interest, and also sustained efforts, for the children will often show concern for the doings and fate of the people in their story.

As this plan can serve as an example of a way to achieve some continuity in the work, and of an evolving scheme covering a series of lessons, it might be useful to go over the plan in more detail.

First we can study some well-known writer's method of presenting a character, by description, for instance, and then ask for a description on similar lines. For the less able pupils it may be better to have one paragraph to give the person's actual appearance, a second to describe his habits, actions, and gestures, and a third to state his traits of

character. Then we can put those together to show how his habits and behaviour and his appearance too, give the clue to his traits of character. Some practice in condensation can thus be obtained, and not as a formal and unrelated exercise.

Some of this will have to be worked out on the board, with all pupils taking part; they have thus a chance of seeing for themselves how one builds up a descriptive sketch, eliminates and economises. Some tests for the effectiveness of the writing should be applied constantly: "Can the person be seen in the mind's eye? Is the description vivid, realistic, or is it over-done?" And so the writing is polished and touched-up until all are satisfied. And each pupil sees how the high-lights are brought out and the picture made realistic and imaginable. Next, individuals try their hands at the same task, first with well-worn types in the conventional school story, then with more original personages; and the tests are applied again, some of them orally with the whole class contributing.

After discussing the kind of place where these people that have been depicted might be met with, or where they might meet each other, a description of the scene is described as vividly as possible, and a test applied; e.g. "Could we draw a plan of the scene?" The final paragraph of this description will include the entrance of one or more of the characters whose fortunes we have chosen to follow. Then come suggestions for the possible adventures of these people: "What might happen to them in that place? What might they be doing there?" The possibilities have to be discussed, and the likelihoods, too, that already have been hinted at in the characters of these people and in their possible reactions to the environment in which they now find themselves. The outlines of the budding story may

now be put on the board by one or more of the pupils ; though it is always best to encourage each pupil to make up his own story. By this time the project is well under way, though the weaker ones will need help before they have gone far, because their performance may fall so far short of their plans and hopes. They will need some kind of stock-taking lesson in which they can hear some portions of what has been written by others, and can make suggestions for improvement, and also for the next instalment, and this will help them to improve their own stories. If the whole scheme is planned as part of a form magazine, for which regular instalments have to be written, success will be more attainable for the less able pupils. These often lose heart because they never carry through to a completion what they have planned, and therefore never see their finished productions. This tailing away of an undertaking is dispiriting, and should be guarded against whenever possible.

Passing on now from story-telling, and leaving its attendant experiments on the writing of dialogues, anecdotes and reported incident untouched, we come to a short series of lessons on "Character Sketches." Continuity with previous work can be secured by drawing attention to the discovery of defects in the character-drawing in the children's narratives, for instance, their vagueness or commonplaceness. The problem can then be presented to the class : "How to bring our characters to life ? How can they be described so that they will be more vividly imagined ? How can we make them interesting instead of leaving them as mere pegs to hang actions on ?"

This problem is much more complex than enthusiasm and hope will often allow. To deal with it adequately, we must understand what goes on in the mind of the writer before the descriptive words which present the personage

appear on the screen of consciousness. First there is the need to think out what character is to be described. Often at this preliminary stage none of those that the child imagines will offer sufficient possibilities to him, for he cannot see the difficulties presented by that particular character, and often he does not know enough about such a personage, and usually he does not fill out the character in imagination with sufficient detail to imagine it vividly enough for verbal description. Thus many children find difficulty at this stage : they have not the novelist's or the painter's power or habit of seeing imagined persons 'in the round' and moving not 'as trees walking' but as real persons living independent lives of their own. It has never been revealed to them that the writer's imagined personages are seen by them as living beings in some environment, rich in detail and vividly alive ; and that these characters sometimes grow more alive and insistent in living their own lives in the mind of their creator. It is optimistically expected by pupils and often by teacher too, that the character will be completely imaginable at the outset, and that all that is necessary is to find words to express what is moving into the focus of the imagination of the young writer. With most children that will not be so ; the character has to grow in definition and distinctness—from the Grin to the Cat—as attention empowers the imagination to fill in the details, and so to give the new creation the quickening hall-marks of reality. Attention alone to the imagined character will be enough for many children. This is why the teacher's questioning can be so helpful to the pupil when it directs the pupil's attention to the detail in his own imagined picture. This questioning on detail enables him to see his 'character' growing in life-like reality, just as a portrait gradually appears in the developing of a

photographic film, the lines sharpening as the opaqueness imperceptibly clears.

The teacher's questioning obviously must stimulate each pupil to build up *his own* imagined character. This can be done by assuming that each will have a different character in mind, by insisting that each pupil will make his own choice of person and of detail, and by comparison of one child's character with another's, and by drawing attention to details suggested by individuals that fit one imagined person but not another. The teacher's part here is to tend the unstable flame of enthusiasm, and to maintain the slight creative effort on its simple but productive level.

The task for the teacher, therefore, is to help each pupil to imagine his 'subject' with some distinctness, and to sustain the necessary attention so that words to express this 'subject' will come to mind. This is to give a training of the deeper linguistic abilities, and not merely to secure a temporary result, however satisfactory.

The task of developing the power of selecting 'the right word' will come later; but the necessity for distinct details, especially those that differentiate, has to be learnt, and learnt fairly early. The discovery that one detail gives a clue to the type or to the individuality of a 'character,' while another is ineffective, is an important one, and worth a special lesson to secure it. The really skilful teacher can plan a lesson so that the pupils make that discovery themselves. This can be done by calling upon each pupil to write a description of a character, and then by having this character drawn by his neighbour from the written description, or by the teacher. A test of this kind will help the writer to see his task more clearly, even if the drawing is poor, and will prove to him that he has succeeded if he sees the drawing has some resemblance to his imagined

figure, and has the same details. It is far better for him to discover how to master this skill by putting his own work to a test in some such way as this, than to discover the art through an examination of the writing of a craftsman. The challenge: "How can we make our descriptions so vivid that we can see our characters as real in our mind's eye?" is a good 'lead' to bring in early during a lesson, so that the class has a realizable standard to try to reach and a clearly defined objective.

It may be a good plan at first to promote discussion of the different types of person that are going to be included in a story. In the course of this a number of conventional types which may be found in the stories that the pupils read in their spare time (or below desks) will appear: the smart or the over-officious detective, the gentleman cat-burglar, the bucolic bobby. Should we discard these in favour of more individual or original types? With most classes of young pupils it is soundest to make use of all their suggestions, and to let them go on with their plans, and then to attempt to give more life and reality to these 'Boy's Own' conventions. And these types are good material for them to try their immature hands on—these characters that they imagine so slickly and with whom they are so familiar. So it is best to let the young writers grow out of these early favourites. Let them therefore bring in the unshaven chin, the ugly purple scar and the greasy red muffler, because by using these obvious poster-paint materials the writers will discover that distinct details can be used to bring out the type; and from there they soon can find that other details do similar and perhaps better work.

It is nearly always necessary and profitable to encourage dabbling about with rough materials at first in order to gain

control over the medium, and to find out what it can do. In fact, it might be advisable with many classes to lead the discussion deliberately towards the describing of these types in order to let the class use them as practice material. However it is done, a class usually profits considerably by producing verbal sketches of the street-watchman seated behind his brazier, or a cook with floury hands and arms, the village blacksmith, and so on. They find that they *can* draw portraits in words ; and that gives them the confidence to try other tasks : it is confidence born of the realization that they have acquired the art of producing in words a pre-determined effect.

Then story-telling will easily lead on to play-writing. Most young pupils take quickly to this ; though too often their dialogue is merely a stream of common-places. It is nearly always necessary to give some 'leading-up' exercises, such as those we might call 'Meetings' and 'Points of View.' In the first of these little dialogues, two characters, opposite in temperament and attitude, meet and start a discussion on some topical subject. The class suggests the characters and the subject, and will then find no difficulty in devising appropriate dialogue. The exercise must be carried out several times, as most classes need time to grasp the interesting possibilities offered. After the conventional types of character and subject have been used, some unusual situation might be proposed, such as a meeting of a ghost and a clergyman in a haunted castle, then fresh ideas of other weird or curious situations will soon be proposed by the more inventive pupils.

In 'Points of View,' soliloquy can be practised as well as dialogue. A situation again has to be decided upon : a small girl expresses her views on a long railway journey that she takes with her aunt, or her aunt tells her bosom-friend

over the garden fence about the trouble she will have to entertain her young niece, or her old grandfather's views on the behaviour of young children in the house are aired with gusto and force. Exercises of this nature give practice in selecting and expressing ideas appropriate to various characters, they interest the pupils in character drawing, and they focus the pupils' attention on other people's outlook on life and problems of the day. The human person to be imagined gives the uncreative pupils something definite and attainable to stimulate their imaginations, and pins more active and fanciful imaginations to work at something particular, for "language is a check on thought, which regulates, even if it often hampers, the expression of ideas by compelling them to assume some degree of formulation, and thus of clarity."¹

¹ L. H. GRAY. *Foundations of Language.*

Chapter 17

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words ; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and book would be in my hand to note down the features of the scene. . . . Thus I lived with words.

R. L. S.

Descriptive Sketches A. To secure continuity in a composition course requires careful planning ; consequently every opportunity of welding a diversity of tasks, with their various aims and forms, into some kind of unity must be seized. And even if the connections are sometimes a little forced or artificial the gain in continuity may well compensate for those drawbacks. This description of this part of the composition course will illustrate how a number of lessons, with similar aims, with one leading naturally into the next, can be treated as a connected and progressive series. This series of lessons, for a good second or third form, can also serve as an example of variety of treatment of part of the course.

The first objective in this series is to help our pupils to write their descriptions with clear-cut lines and precision of detail. In order to give a worth-while task to a class in this matter it is best to propose some well-known subject, and one which offers some challenge to them : ' A Busy Railway Station ' might do, for instance. We must choose some subject that has made a strong impression on their minds, for, if the impression is distinct and sharp in outline,

words which have some descriptive quality are more likely to become available to them when they are writing.

The more important part of the teacher's work comes at the early stage of these lessons. Copious suggestions as to size, appearance, colour, movements, etc., have to be called for, and the class closely questioned. This questioning has a special purpose, and must not be carried out in a perfunctory manner or without clear aim: it is to help the pupils to discipline their imaginations, and so to build up with clarity and precision what they are imagining. For it is clear that, in order to answer, the young minds are forced to concentrate on the pictorial aspect of their 'subject,' and this throws upon them the necessity for exact imagining. The more the questions aim at precise detail, the more they will help the pupils to think of expressive words that will make their descriptions lively and vivid.

The next stage is to present them with a challenge: "Write your descriptions so that a reader can imagine it exactly as it really is, or will suppose it to be real, if it is imaginary." Then when the writing has been completed, the test is applied: "Can we imagine it exactly?" The pupils at first have to be given practice in applying the test, and need guidance in weighing up the best passages in a number of descriptions. Most classes can soon learn to assess their own descriptions, though it is best to call for comments, reasons, evidence and examples, before accepting the assessments. After this, they may be given other tests to apply: "Is the detail accurate? Is it true to life?"—"Does the train really move like that?"—"What happens to the smoke, and what does it *look* like?"—"Does the crowd 'surge,' or does it 'split up'?"—"Do the people move like disturbed ants, or do they just wander about aimlessly?"—"Do they weave in and out, loiter or rush?"

“ What words are you going to use in order to give the exact impression of all their comings and goings, and of the general confusion and ‘ busyness ’ ? ”

In training our pupils to apply tests of this kind to their writings, we stimulate them to discuss and to make suggestions for improving what they have found in them that is feeble or inexact. We thus exert an unobtrusive pressure on them to achieve a greater precision and expressiveness than they could have arrived at by themselves ; and we help them to form a standard—of sorts—for themselves. We have also made them interested in the problem of trying to get a certain effect in writing. If we can develop this habit of regarding a written task as a problem to be tackled and solved, we shall have provided them with a technique which will enable them to make progress in all their writing, and perhaps in all their studies in almost every subject.

Of course their first attempts will not take them very far, nor need we be anxious if the result at first is just a jumble of detail ; because when we remember the difficulty of the problem, we cannot expect to be given really pictorial writing with the first attempt. There may be many immature attempts to perform this skilled job. These first attempts fulfil one useful purpose, even if they do not teach the children very much, they help them to come up against the difficulties in their own writings, so that they will be able to see more clearly what the task entails. If they can see where they have failed, and without its having been pointed out to them, they will be ready, and perhaps curious, to find out how to solve these problems. Good teaching always tries to foster a lively curiosity in method, in procedure, in *how* to set about a job, and in ways of achieving success in it.

Why is it that teachers do not concern themselves more with the fostering of curiosity, instead so often of quelling it, of damping the ardour of the enquiring mind ? Curiosity—the desire to know. The presentation of tasks as problems to be solved, and each solved perhaps in more than one way by different pupils—there being a number of possible solutions—is stimulating to so many pupils ; they respond to the challenge, and are the more ready to look at and criticize their own work objectively. They are therefore the more ready to work over it, to make improvements in it, or to have another shot at the same task, thereby taking a perceived step forward. Then when after several tries they manage to succeed, they find great satisfaction in such an achievement. Success in achieving a task is a wonderful stimulus to further effort—but so often we forget that, thinking that we need to ‘drive’ or to labour more conscientiously in careful explanation in order to ensure our pupils’ progress.

Descriptive Sketches B. We now pass on to a short series of lessons, for a good third or a fourth form, on what we may call “Word Studies” or “Impressions from an Artist’s Sketch Book.” This series is to give a training in the more sensitive use of words ; and therefore also in the more precise and appreciative regard for the finer qualities of what we see and hear and feel.

Training in this kind of expression-work must be limited in scope and focus ; otherwise it may foster inexactness and insincerity. A careful choice of open-air scenes, sounds, colours, lights and shades, movements and shapes will give us the kind of ‘subject’ that requires distinctness and fine exactness of expression ; for we must have specially selected subjects to work on if we are to learn how to use language as a ‘precision instrument.’ The task may begin with a

"Do-you-remember?" game: "Do you remember the stilly silence of the early morning when the first heavy fall of snow covered the houses and roads?"—"Do you remember the ghostly feeling of the quiet, white expanse in the frosty moonlight?" Or "Who can remind us of some scene that appeared very distinct and unusual?" For instance, "Let us think of a small shoal of minnows turning smoothly with the current in a clear stream: what words can we think of to express *exactly* what that movement was like when they all turned in unison?" Then suggestions for suitable words may come from the class, and after brief comments on some of them by the pupils (which explain the exact impression given by each word), the class will be ready to choose the best words. Many other brief expression exercises can be run through in this way, though always with careful attention to the finer qualities of the thing or movement, or whatever it is that is recalled with delight and appreciation.

It is necessary of course to find out what the members of a class like watching, or have enjoyed without perhaps realizing it, but there is really no end to the 'subjects' which will give the uniqueness and peculiar grace of movement, loveliness of line or colour or form, enough to catch the interest, or echo the experience of nearly every pupil; and after a few especially inviting examples have been given from the desk, the class will often supply more than can be dealt with. So that after the first step all that one need do is to set the ball rolling by proposing the general subject, e.g., a series of sky scenes, starting with the early summer sky with billowing cumulus clouds, or a flaming sunset fading to dull orange and lucid green. Then later can come 'Snow Scenes,' 'Lights and Shades'—inside a close-grown fir wood, or a sunny sea viewed from inside a cave; or

opaque ice—like thin glass—filling the hoofmarks in muddy farm gateways and cart-tracks.

What other 'subjects' can a class attempt, and what precision and delicacy of imaginative perception should we expect from them? Let us take 'Grace of Movement,' and call for words to catch the delicate movements of a squirrel gliding lightly from branch to branch, or some sleek deer moving elegantly over the grass, or a frog swimming with sinuous rhythm, or the supple gliding of a grass snake. If the children have not seen these things, they ought, if possible, to be shown them. Or take 'Flight' of sea-gulls, ducks, herons, swans, aircraft of different kinds, or the windhover's fluttering mid-air poise, peewits whirling up and down, or rooks being blown about in a high wind. Or take 'Rustling Noises'—mice in paper, a fire dying down, a cow tearing grass, the faint sibilance of silk dresses; or take 'Water Noises,' or 'Shapes,' or 'Changing Horizons.'

We can try now for a word, now for a phrase, now for a sentence; but always we have to catch the precise sound, the exact tint, the quality of light, in language that we feel does truly express for us exactly what we have seen or heard. Nothing can be too commonplace or too minute for our keen and active observation: the boldly curved line of a bird's wing, of a boat's timbers, of a fern leaf uncurling, or of a branched tree. Even the town will yield sufficient for our purposes once the encouragement has been given and the questing mind fired by success. Through example, practice, appreciation, and especially through success in finding a word or phrase that aptly records a detail or impression that has given a moment of delight, our pupils may begin to find such pleasure in the game of 'Find-the-Right-Word,' and so they may incite one another, and indeed become quite excited about what they have noticed.

Their observation and appreciation of the things around them then become keener and more penetrating. This result, or by-product, as it might be called, is most important, for we have to remember always that in developing language habits, as in all *real* education, we are intimately concerned with *living* ; that is to say, not only with a language skill, but with an intelligent and critical regard for the things immediately of importance to us, with an exact appreciation of their qualities, with an understanding of their true nature, their purpose, and above all, their value. We might note, too, that an aesthetic value also has its usefulness, because it has a purpose in our lives : if we are aware of the aesthetic qualities of things and the expression of them, we have knowledge of other values in life than materialistic ones. It is right to be ambitious in this matter for "the appreciation of values is a peculiarly important and delicate feature of thought."¹

It is therefore essential that we should foster these habits of appreciating the finer things of life, and habits of evaluating all things. We can encourage our pupils to imitate the artist when he fills up his sketch-book with quickly roughed-in sketches. They should of course see some reproductions of these sketch-books, if the teacher has not one of his own ; they can have pocket note-books for word-pictures instead of drawings, and can jot down brief descriptions of the various things that they see in their walks and journeys ; and this experience in recording impressions, and the pleasure of finding exact expression for them in words will establish good linguistic habits. The discussion of some of these in later lessons, and the

¹ W. E. JOHNSON. *Logic*. (Quoted by Lorimer in *The Growth of Reason*.)

questions, interest and praise of their fellow-pupils, will give still further encouragement.

Now, though it may appear far-fetched, what we are attempting to do is to make our pupils use their imaginations and powers of expression in the same way as a great writer often uses his—in the same way, though not of course with the same intensity, nor with the same penetration or the same success. We are also proposing to use the same technique and the same incentive to expression as the artist has: "When trying to find the right word to catch the exact quality of a thing, you must concentrate on its colour or sound or shape, you must hold the thing in mind and gaze at it with the mind's eye, and the right word will come." We propose the use of this technique because such single-minded focusing of attention on something of interest is one of the prime necessities of learning,¹ just as it is of expression—for how can we express if we do not really *know*, and to know requires close and undivided attention. This truth, and this light on the nature of knowing, has been neglected by many educationists, but many writers and artists have recorded their intent imagining of the life and scenes they are writing about or painting; for instance, Tchekov says: "While writing [*The Steppes*] I caught the odour of summer and the lure of the steppe," and "You see, to depict horse thieves in 700 lines, I must all the time speak and think in their tone and feel in their spirit."² And George Eliot: "The book Mrs. Meyrick had before her was Erckmann-Chatrian's *Histoire d'un Conscrit*. She had just finished reading it . . . 'It is hardly

¹ "In order to learn we must *attend* and in order to profit by what we have learnt, we must think, i.e. reflect." S. T. COLERIDGE. *Aids to Reflection*.

² *Letters on Literature*.

to be called a story,' said Kate. 'It is a bit of history brought near us with a strong telescope. We can see the soldiers' faces; no, it is more than that—we can hear everything—we can almost hear their hearts beat.' ”¹

But the child's mind usually directs only a feeble ray of light on what catches his attention, and so he cannot aspire to vie with the achievements of the great artist, who reveals the true essence of the object, and lights it up for us in a peculiarly fresh way; but, as the smallest light burns brightly in the dark, so can the child's simple but expressive word give a special flavour to some experience that he has had. The criticism, that this is aiming too high, may not be adverse criticism, for it is essential to be ambitious; the results are better when one is. If this is doubted, let the thing be tried out in practice: the results would convince the doubters.

Descriptive Sketches C. By now the work is well launched, our pupils can produce a reasonable amount of writing, and they are beginning to discover the problems involved in the tackling of different kinds of subject, and in attempting various kinds of writing. But their descriptions of a scene and their handling of similar subjects are too often mere catalogues and generalizations, amorphous and sprawling. These pupils (of a second or third form perhaps) have not yet learnt that there should be a central theme to give their work unity, and a central theme will itself determine the selection of detail. To convince them of this, we must help them to find some experience that they have known vividly, and that is likely to be somewhat overwhelming for them to deal with effectively in writing: a subject that has more than one centre of interest or that has attractive subsidiary interests, a subject perhaps with scattered high

¹ *Daniel Deronda.*

lights and copious detail. We need a subject that is familiar to the class, and that in itself has no single outstanding thread, no evident proportion or order. So we choose a subject that will come back to the pupils' memories rich in colour, full of movement and bustle, and possibly loud with a confusion of sounds ; for the *need* to control a confused welter of impressions must be felt by each pupil.

We then propose that each member of the class chooses some scene which is crowded with activity, movement, noise and colour, which is well known to them and abounding in detail. We give them a lead here, as the independent choice of subject is not an objective we are concerned with at the moment. We want something like 'An English Street-Market,' 'The Village Fair,' 'A Bank Holiday Scene,' or perhaps 'My First Fancy-Dress Dance.' We start by investigating some subjects, selecting one to work on together, but encouraging each pupil to work up a subject of his own choosing. Then by questioning and discussion, we find out the possibilities of the selected subject, and ensure that our pupils are aware of the abundance of the scene. We may start then to collect suggestions from the class, and there should be many, for the familiarity and liveliness of the subject should arouse ready and diverse responses. Soon we shall have the board covered with a chaotic list of farmers, farmers' wives, hucksters, gipsies, children, cattle, poultry, pigs and dogs—a hubbub, a litter and a bustle. This disorderly flow of suggestions is represented on the board by long lists of words, symbols of random memories and of imagined reality : these will be the rough material to be ordered and shaped.

The question : " What are we going to do next ? " and the sight of the formless catalogue on the board may sometimes be sufficient to prompt some of the class to ejaculate :

"There must be a plan!" For even the most inexperienced pupils do not like to be confused, and the quick ones already know what must be done. But we should ourselves realize that the confusion and the obvious need for selection and order are not a matter of words only, but of thought and imagining. It is the whole imagined scene that needs to be shaped and ordered in the mind of each pupil.

The general opinion among some teachers seems to be that one should consider first the outline and the 'form' of the composition; but this is a mistake. It is the ordered and proportioned build-up of the scene in imagination that should be attended to at first. We must, therefore, discuss what the central theme is to be, and questions must be put to as many pupils as possible in order to stir each mind to begin an orderly and independent re-imagining of the subject. When several possible centralizing themes have been examined, each pupil is pressed to make his own choice, and to study closely the scene that he himself has in mind. In this way we shall be presented with a variety of market scenes—in changing times and seasons, early morning preparations and the evening's bareness. Some pupils will no doubt choose to work at a certain impression, and must then be urged to keep to that, and to select and retain only the details that will contribute to the expression of that view-point or imagined aspect.

Others may look at the market from a distance, or as if they were standing in the midst of all its animated busyness, and others again may elect to view it in the evening as they approach it, then as they walk through, and finally as they pass into the darkness of the countryside, leaving it behind them, and aware only of distant lights and sounds. These writers must be persuaded to reject all the details in their rough note-books that do not help the reader to

imagine himself to be in those places and aware of those things.

By this time most classes will want to begin writing, but others will not be ready enough, and will require a further stage in the lesson. These less expressive pupils usually have little verbal facility, and need the stimulus of their quicker comrades, and some examples of what is required, before they are able to supply expressive words to represent what they have chosen to depict. So the next stage is to help them to collect the words they might make use of later in their writing.

Again we must recall the central theme: "Which impression shall we deal with first, or what point of view?" The class chooses, and the teacher angles for suggestions. If the class starts with something concrete and striking, such as the lights of a fair at night, contributions will be forthcoming, such as 'brilliant,' 'dazzling,' 'shining,' 'bright'; and with more encouragement, perhaps, 'glistening,' 'flaring,' 'flaming,' 'flame-coloured.' These and any others are discussed and some are rejected; only those which help to build up the chosen theme are retained. Usually one theme, impression or view-point can be dealt with fully in this way; but the one sample is often enough to give each pupil some clue to the selection of his own material. If the final results are disappointing, and too many of the writers have been merely topographically minute, perhaps laying out the details of the place and omitting the vital foreground, or on the other hand have been so impressionistic that all is a misty blur, there need be few regrets, for further insight into the task will have been gained by all who have tried to carry it out, because "every experiment would add a little to knowledge, and

increase the control over the medium by developing technique." ¹

For though children's execution will often fall short of the lively conceptions and delights that they had imagined, it is with their mental activities that we are primarily concerned, and not with the producing of fine finished articles. We are concerned with the mastery of language and the resulting growth of mental power and skill in expression. So that if we have stimulated their minds to some simple activity, we shall have provided fruitful opportunities for the exercise and growth of their linguistic abilities.

Thus we shall have made a pointed attack on the 'cataloguing composition,' and on the writing which gives merely generalized or conventional statements, or describes only vaguely imagined and imperfectly conceived events or scenes. And such an attack on each of these weaknesses will, on careful diagnosis of pupils' failures in composition, be found often to be necessary, and sometimes extremely effective. Practice in making use of a dominant note in description will show these pupils how to avoid spineless writing, and how to impose some arrangement and order on copious but amorphous material.

A rich impression of animated colour and movement is one which these pupils should now be able to handle with some fair show of success. Those that choose the static view-point as the determining theme, or one that is moving (first approaching, then in the midst, and finally leaving), or a contrasted one, "Saturday Morning—Saturday Night," have in the single view or in the movement, or in the contrast, a controlling and shaping force that exerts its pressure as well as its stimulus towards exactness and

¹ Sir PERCY BUCK. *The Scope of Music.*

clarity, both of imagining and of expression. But even more than that, by urging each pupil to make his own choice, and to work on one impression only, we have not only enabled them to visualize their themes with distinctly individualized qualities and characteristics, but in so doing we have given them just the stimulus and the definition that concreteness provides, and that their imaginations require. In the end the class will have achieved some satisfaction in the exercise of their abilities and in their practice of the craft of writing ; and they will have won some confidence in themselves, and in their ability to express in words an experience that moves into form by the regulating control of its own leading motif.

In almost every sphere precepts are of less value than practical experiments.

M. F. QUINTILIAN. *Institutio Oratoria*. Book II. v.

Chapter 18

THE INCREASE AND SHARPENING OF VOCABULARY

It is probably superfluous to explain at length to those who know, how the choice of the right word . . . endues the facts as it were with a living voice.

LONGINUS. *On the Sublime.*

The Right Word (A). Some children have such an ample word-store, built up through copious reading and hearing spirited conversation, that exercises to increase it are unnecessary ; and so there are a few classes which need not be given special work to improve exactness of expression, for most of the pupils in them have acquired good language habits. The words that they use to express what they have seen and done and thought tally sufficiently with the experiences themselves. But most of the pupils in secondary schools to-day will not have a richly varied store of words at their disposal, and their language habits will be erratic and very often quite unformed. Other pupils still may have enough words at their command, but they will be without skill in the use of them, some words being over-worked, others inexactly used, and the majority inert through lack of the requisite occasion to use them precisely. These pupils need directly focused training in expression.

It is necessary to arrange expression exercises for these pupils so that they will perceive for themselves the need for exactness and its value, or the need for some special effect which a carefully selected word will make ; such

pupils have to learn consciously that some careful effort must be made to catch the exact quality or impression in a scene or event. It may be necessary therefore to make a break in the work they are doing, and instead of their continuing to write a series of stories, articles or sketches for form magazines or for some other kind of publication, the teacher himself for a short spell may have to direct their interests and their attention to problems in writing, and to a few of the ways that writers solve them. This directing of attention to ways of writing and to 'special techniques' should normally come only as an interim task before fresh assignments and practice in purposeful expression are undertaken.

So that, now, instead of the class being encouraged to write original compositions, a piece of description or some other passage from their own writings is set before them, with variant readings of selected words and phrases. These alternatives may be given by the teacher at first, but are best collected orally from the class ; they may range from those which are patently adequate to those which are clearly misfits. Comments and criticisms from the class soon quicken the young minds to apprehend more concretely and distinctly what at first was unrealized or but vaguely imagined. Argument and discussion on the choice of a word for each detail of the 'subject' will work like a whetstone on effort and skill, sharpening the imagined scene until each pupil recognizes intuitively when a word has exactly fitted what he has in mind, and when it has not. This is the climax of the lesson, and is a particularly vital step in language training, for the experience of finding expression, even if only one word, that is felt to be so exactly right that it sounds like a living voice, is a very stimulating one. To have achieved expression which is satisfying to

oneself is to have established a standard for oneself. This is the most important step of all : the birth of one's feeling of responsibility for language and for the use of it in expression. But even if something less than this has been achieved by most of the class, much will have been gained when pupils find pleasure in discussing, selecting and moulding language.

Let us now look more closely at some scene that might be selected for a class to work on : "As the boy came downstairs in the early winter morning, all that he could see in the room were the . . . chairs, . . . table and . . . window through which a . . . light came. Black shadows . . . the room. . . ." When we have got from the class a short list of possible words for each gap in the picture, we shall have a smudged and overlaid scene. Then all those words that are blurring in effect, and that do not contribute a clear definition, must be erased. Under the friction of proposals and counter-proposals from the class the outlines of the scene begin to sharpen ; and at the end, the lights and shades, shapes and colours stand out clearly. Questions to focus the minds on detail will be : "What degree of darkness is the room in when the boy first enters it ? Which things in the room are just distinguishable, and what are their shapes ? Can he see where the window is ? What does it look like ?" So the questions go on, always adapting themselves to the abilities and interests of the class, and always aimed at exact details of a 'true-to-life' kind, so that wavering imaginations may have something known and distinct to keep them looking at *that* room, and with the eyes of *that* boy.

As this recall of a special moment, which may not have been experienced in the past by many of the class, may be too strange or lacking in interest, this opening scene

may not be fully successful. Too much must not be expected at first. But let us suppose that the class has composed this beginning: "He crept down on tiptoe and entered the room. All he could make out in the wintry darkness was the faint glimmer of the chair-backs, the dull expanse of the table-top and the pale grey shape of the big kitchen window." The scene therefore has been imagined clearly enough, and so we may pass on to the lighting of the fire, a more familiar and attractive occupation. Now the memories of the class become more active and exact, and each pupil will begin to be aware how precise his observation has been in the past when exact details are proposed, and each will perceive how skilfully a small detail can be caught with a right word. It is indeed often a great surprise to a class to perceive how sure some of their fellows can be about the exactness of each thing or movement that is being focused in imagination. An almost fierce denial and argument often reveal the precision of previous observation: a precision which hitherto would be quite unrealized. Many a class can call up such a scene to memory swiftly and intensely as it would be familiar and significant to them. Then the resulting expression will be good, though without this exact imagining it may not be. So the story can continue, perhaps something like this: "... and many columns of smoke stream (go, flow, rise) up the chimney. Then an intermittent (occasional, single) flame licks (spurts, juts, shoots) through the bars, and tiny tongues of yellow flicker upwards (rush, spout, jerk). A light creeps (curls, runs, glides) round the edges of the paper, a rustle is heard, and a crackling. Then come sparks and a spurt of light, then a rush (puff, cloud) of grey smoke, and a bright flame leaps (jumps, springs, shoots) up . . ." The alternatives come quickly as the class is at home in this work, and the

words come unprompted and usually with quick eagerness. Under the pressure of the questioning and the need to illuminate precise details their words begin to express what they feel is very real to them ; and when the right word appears they feel its special fittingness and expressive force. Again a climax has been reached.

The story can then be carried on : " What can we see in the room now ? " We turn from the fire and look round the room and see the flames reflected now on the backs of the chairs, now on the legs of the table and on the cups on the dresser. The room becomes familiar and homely ; and the next chapter can begin. But even if a sufficiently interesting or feasible plot does not evolve out of these slow beginnings, the class has taken part in an experience in writing that is also an experience in education, for we believe with Dr. Johnson that " there is for every thought a certain nice adaptation of words which none other could equal, and which, when a man has been so fortunate as to hit, he has attained, in that particular case, to the perfection of language."

The Right Word (B). At a later stage another kind of work on words can be carried out. This task presents greater difficulty. Our pupils should now be ready to perceive that the choice of words is a matter of care and also of intention. They should now be able to see that differences in the suggestions that words can make will affect the quality of a story or of any other piece of writing. This task can begin by the class examining a flat, dull passage of prose, and perhaps by discovering that it might be brought to life. The help of the pupils is enlisted, and alternatives for those words that are adjudged by them to be feeble, vague or inappropriate are collected. Each key word lacking vitality must be dealt with first ; and as some of

the alternatives suggested will be good, some poor, each group is taken in turn, and through discussion and majority decision the poor words are crossed out and the best selected.

Sometimes good words will be rejected by a class, and poor ones retained ; that may be quite satisfactory as it may lead to the pupils' discovery that until a decision has been reached about the impression or bias that should be given to the story or description, the choice of a word must often remain disputable or poor. During the discussion the pupils become aware of the possibilities of giving a special flavour to the passage, and they begin to note those words which push the tale over to lean, say, towards the gruesome, or the commonplace. This provides for a further understanding of the problem, and establishes the conviction that they must give close attention to words, their meanings and associations, and also to the combined operations that these play in a passage of description or narrative.

As the selection of the best word depends very much on the kind of story one is writing, it is profitable to give the class only the general setting and framework of part of the story. A good class can then decide, after discussion, on the flavour that is to be given to that passage. If the pupils are working in groups, each group can take a different aspect, and each pupil can then join the group dealing with the aspect that is most attractive to him. With an inexperienced class it is better to make the first lesson a communal effort in which decisions have to be made after discussion. Also with this type of class it is profitable to pretend that a story is being written for a school magazine. For pupils with really poor linguistic equipment, one can make up a simple description with carefully chosen dull words for them to improve, so as to give an obvious need for lively alternatives and improvements.

It is not unsound to provide a background and setting for a story that is to be written by a class, such as we have suggested ; but the class should always be incited to picture the scenes, person or action selected for working on, and should discuss and decide upon such things as the time of day, of the year, the kind of weather appropriate to that part of the story, and should talk over the effect of these details on the action as it develops.

In addition, details in the description of the key points of the story may have to be weighed up against the background, and their usefulness in determining character or plot carefully considered. If the detail begins to crowd out the action or the general effect, as it may well do, that will not matter at first in this part of the course, for it will give a class the opportunity of discovering for itself the necessity for high lights and good proportions. It is usually quite easy for a class to find out what details are confusing the total effect and should be discarded. The main purpose, however, of this kind of work is to give directed practice in the selection of words, in increasing the precision of details by substituting other words, and in weighing up the importance of the factors governing the selection of words. If, however, the proposal to write a story really takes fire, and the class is urgent in its requests to go on with it, then fewer details should be examined ; for in this instance it is unlikely that descriptive details will swamp the development of the action.

It will be realized, of course, that there can be no useful purpose served if the dominant note is not decided upon at first, or if it is not actively imagined and used as a determinant by the pupils. Because discussions on the choice of words will be fruitless, and perhaps even misleading, if decisions on word-selection are not governed by the main

intention, whatever that may be, such as quiet loneliness, or hurrying energy, or excited action, or eeriness. The 'Right Word' apart from a context does not exist; there must be some governing theme or purpose (or, as it is often vaguely called, some 'atmosphere'), to act as the criterion in the selecting. By making use of a criterion of this kind, a class can legitimately choose or reject, and can perceive with much certainty which word will be the most appropriate in a given situation, and also what particular quality a word contributes.

Nevertheless, if at any time some of the class insist on a word that appears unsuitable, their word must not be dismissed as 'wrong' or 'inappropriate,' because their insistence may show that those pupils are referring their word to an imagined picture or situation of their own, and that must never be suppressed.

Another exercise with similar aims and values can be given by making a watered-down version of part of a story, or description, and by asking the class to heighten it in outline, or in richness of colouring, or liveliness of action, or in some other appropriate quality. Whereas the first exercise can best be worked at by the whole class with the passage written on the board, this one is more suitable for individual work, each pupil selecting the words that need attention, and making his unaided choice. At the end, the various choices can be given out by individual pupils orally, and subjected to the criticism of all. This provides an exacting test for a pupil's feeling for words, so that it may have to be tried more than once with varied passages in order to give ample opportunity for developing every pupil's abilities, and in order to give the variety of subject necessary to catch the special interests and experience of each pupil, and to tap words in different fields of thought.

The study of vivid passages of description or narration may then follow this refurbishing of a flat passage as a complementary exercise. In this, much must be left to individual pupils, as leading questions may easily deprive the class of some useful training in unaided response to significant wording. Passages that are overdone or have some other obvious defect should be used, too, so that the class, not knowing the quality of the passages beforehand, may have some opportunities of using their critical powers, and of detecting (or missing) lavish effects, gaudiness, wordiness, confusion, etc. We have to guard against the easy response that knows only too well what is wanted, and gives the answer that is *thought* to be called for, instead of the answer that says what has been truly felt. Without sincerity it is impossible to develop pupils' sensitiveness to language. Indeed, it is often advisable to impress on a class, especially a senior class, the urgent need for honesty in intellectual matters, and to explain why "I don't understand," or "I think it is uninteresting," may be a much better and a more productive answer than one which pretends enjoyment in a passage. With a senior class a short talk on the reasons for intellectual responsibility and honesty would be appropriate.

The New Word. As Professor S. S. Laurie wrote,¹ "Our business as educators is to give to these words definite and clear signification, and to help the child in adding to his stock." So exercises on 'The Right Word' provide practice for our pupils to give definite and clear meaning to words, and work on 'The New Word' will help them to add to their stock. The aim therefore of this section of the course is to introduce new words into the vocabulary

¹ *Lectures on Language and Linguistic Method in School.*

of our pupils, though to what extent this can be done is a matter of conjecture. It is fairly certain that our ideas and theories about 'the enlargement of the child's vocabulary,' which is so optimistically catered for in many textbooks, need to be strictly scrutinized. Too often people try to graft on to the child's stock of words the off-shoots of a mature vocabulary that have no connection with his living experience, so that as there is no sap in the young tree to feed the new scion, it is not nourished, but becomes parasitic and then dies. The result sometimes is that pupils learn to produce words like a slot-machine—the effect of a purely artificial stimulus. New words need to belong to some vivid reality, to be ushered in and supported by a significant environment or living 'context,' in fact in some milieu that is strongly felt. *Then*, the word may be remembered, and may perhaps become available for use in other contexts.

Nevertheless even though a pupil's vocabulary cannot be increased rapidly, some kinds of work on new words have other usefulness, for instance, to train the exact and expressive use of language. The outline plan of a lesson on 'The New Word' might be as follows: first the class contributes a number of details to describe some exciting event, such as visiting the dynamo room of a big factory or the machine shops and weaving rooms of a cotton mill. Then the words and phrases expressive of the sound and movement are collected and listed on the board; the teacher *on this occasion* making his contribution of new words too. The lists are then discussed, with questioning to bring out the exact flavour or the full meaning of the new words. Here again, guidance can be given in order to direct attention to those words which will be the most useful for the final version. Those words that are lacking

in descriptive power are rubbed out, as only the best should receive attention.

The second step in this series consists of reading, studying and even memorizing a passage of prose on the same or a similar subject, and one that is rich in expressiveness and in pictorial and other imagery ; for instance, the opening page of Williamson's *The Wet Flanders Plain* or a translation of *La Musique des Cloches* from *Notre-Dame de Paris*. Only the more striking words need be studied, but some of the phrases and sentences might be learnt well enough to be repeated orally. Finally a composition on some very similar topic is written, in this case it should be a topic in which sound and force dominate, for it should always be a topic which requires the use of similar diction, such as "Caught in a Tunnel on a Busy Mainline Railway," "At an Aero-Engine Test Bench." These compositions may form the basis for further work, though until we have them in front of us we cannot determine what the next step should be.

Looking back to assess the value and purpose of this method, we see that we begin with some recalled or imagined scene, which is then made sharper and more distinct in detail by the class ; the expression of this develops and improves as the lesson proceeds. This way of beginning is essential if the full value of the method is to be secured ; because the pupils' minds, which are likely to be inexpert in expressing some forceful or enthralling event, must first face the problem of clarifying their experience without help ; they must have the opportunity of finding words to express their imagined experiences, and then, in the second stage, of discovering that other words, new to them, help to make their expression more complete and exact. And in this second stage, they meet some experience fully and strongly expressed by a mature and vivid mind ; they

meet this experience too at a time when their own minds are readily responsive to the full effect of that adult writer's work. Their minds have been moving towards a richer and deeper experience, and so they are more ready than at almost any other time to find that the new expression is a further clarifying and completing of what their own minds have begun to build up and formulate.

Finally, with this valuable training behind them, they attempt another piece of work that they have independently to imagine and to express in words ; but they will be able to accomplish this more difficult task because the practice that they have had, and the mature expression they have responded to, will have stimulated their linguistic abilities to achieve more effective expression than hitherto. Then having completed this series of lessons, the class can profitably attempt other rather similar tasks or exercises in expression, for they now have a model and a standard, and they have practised the procedure of imagining an event with some exactness, and of working at the expression of it until they find a similar exactness in words.

Before leaving this part of the course we may note that the study of passages from good writers will be more profitable when interest in the problems of expression has previously been aroused. When this has been done, a series of lessons may be started which give attention to the way that writers tackle some of these problems, and how they solve them. The class, then, can face some of the problems at a simple level, and try to find solutions by experiment. This kind of work leads on to the appreciation of the effective use of language ; and should usually begin by the pupils asking themselves : " What is the writer doing ? What is his intention ? How does he carry that out ? " That is a more fruitful ' lead in ' to the appreciation

of good, efficient prose writing than the search for supposed 'beauties' of expression and 'purple patches'—with its unfortunate implication of 'fine writing for fine writing's sake.'

Let us now look more closely at conditions that are favourable to the learning of new words. There are three : a vital and clearly apprehended experience, a strongly felt need for expression (in this case, for words), and the new word supplying that need. The new word should be perceived or felt to be adequate in expressing the thought, idea or emotion which, rising in consciousness, is pressing for verbal expression. In order, therefore, to enlarge our pupils' vocabularies we need at times to set the stage so that the optimum conditions for the acquisition of new words are present. This is not an impossible task, though it seems to demand much ; all that we require is some exciting or forceful event for the class to imagine, and the well-directed technique to prepare the minds of the pupils so that they are 'warmed up' and pressing forward to seek for words to express this new experience that they are re-creating.

We have insisted on the experience having some striking qualities. The reason for this is that the minds of our pupils have to be stirred out of their routine habits of using only a conventional vocabulary, which is mainly picked up from the juvenile reading matter they like so much and from the make-shift language of everyday life. Their routine language habits have to be broken into so that new words can get access. For full success, it is necessary for them to feel that the words they already have at their disposal are inadequate in expressiveness to catch the qualities of the things and events they are imagining or recalling. The less able the class is in expression, and the less lively in

suggesting words and ideas, the more urgent it is to start them off on some really invigorating and stirring story or incident. It will be obvious that some of the pupils will always need to be driven forward by energetic questioning to help them to reach out beyond their first attempts at expressing a chosen subject, and so that they will be stimulated to apprehend its most outstanding qualities in the highest degree that is possible to each of them.

Similar methods can be used to stir the pupil's passive vocabulary to become gradually more active. This, too, is important for the pupil's growth and development. Through questioning, practice and urgent demands on the pupil's expressive abilities, his usable vocabulary should be made more readily available whenever an urgent occasion or an unusual one arises, and requires expression in words. Nearly every pupil will have a comparatively large passive vocabulary that he never draws upon when he talks or writes ; these words usually lie inert and unproductive in his mind, and do not enrich or stir his thinking, or help to make what he happens to have in mind any clearer. But all good language work and all good teaching have some good effect on the linguistic habits of the pupils, though those pupils whose minds are unresponsive and slow in expression must be given directed and ample practice in using their mother tongue in order to stir their passive vocabularies into purposeful activity. It is, however, impossible to give enough practice to affect a large number of these passive words and expressions ; but we need not worry if the number is rather small ; for it is the mental habit of reaction and response which transforms passive words into active that we have to stimulate ; and if we develop this habit, the process of imbuing passive words

with activity in expression will often continue, and perhaps may become vigorous.

What we really have to attend to, then, is linguistic habit forming, not merely the bringing of a few words into activity in expression. It is indeed remarkable that so little attention seems to have been given to the need of helping the less able pupils to develop good linguistic habits. It does not appear to have been noted widely that often some of a pupil's linguistic habits have to be *unseated*—and then made flexible and adaptable. For example, the linguistic habit of using clichés, set formulas, unvaried responses and diction, have to be broken down, and their language reactions *freed* from the slavery of their routine habits ; and then injected with fresh life, if the speaker or writer is to begin to make progress in acquiring a real command of his mother tongue. Pupils with a poor command of language have not necessarily poor intellectual abilities ; what may have happened is that they have formed a rigid habit of using stereotyped language and a very limited vocabulary, perhaps through no fault of their own ; and they may have made the fullest use of that kind of language, perhaps because they have never been made to use their mother tongue as a flexible and adaptable instrument to carry out their thought processes, their intentions and the conative impulses of will, wish and need. As Dr. Johnson observed : "A great part of their language is proverbial. If anything rocks at all, they say *it rocks like a cradle*." This habit is an inevitable one, so that good teaching to sharpen the mind's edge and give point to its thinking by the use of sharply defining words is nearly always necessary.

At the utmost we have only to rescue words, already existing and familiar, from the false or vague meanings imposed on them by carelessness, or by the clipping and debasing misuse of the market.

S. T. COLERIDGE. *Aids to Reflection*.

Words are the people's, yet there is a choice of them to be made.

BEN JONSON. *Timber*.

Chapter 19

UPPER SCHOOL COMPOSITION : GENERAL AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

He must first think and excogitate his matter, then choose his words, and examine the weight of either. Then take care, in placing and ranking both matter and words, that the composition be comely ; and to do this with diligence and often.

BEN JONSON. *Timber.*

Emphasis must again be placed on the necessity for clearly defined aims ; they are just as necessary in this part of the course as in each of the previous three or four years' work in written English. Possibly they are even more important during the last years of a pupils' schooling, because the work of the pupils at this stage should be given more 'finish,' and should quickly acquire some qualities of good arrangement and of an ordered design ; so that now for the majority of pupils direct focus on these qualities is required, and a deliberate drive for the more formal aspects of a piece of writing. The general objective might be "The Organization of Thought and the Organization of Experience"—and here 'experience' is to be interpreted in its widest sense, even though much of the lives and thought of many of the pupils will be centred mainly on their school and school work, and therefore will be narrowly limited.

It will be evident to all that the reason for including the organization of experience in our general aim is that improvement in the handling of language does not take place

apart from improvement in response to experience. Improve the one, and the other will also be improved. Increase the alertness and the keenness of perception, as well as the deeper appreciation of experience, and a finer and more expressive use of language must almost certainly follow. It will be evident, too, that the formal elements of language are so closely bound up with 'content' that in order to achieve formal excellence we must give close attention to it ; that is to say, to clearer conceptions of the subject we are writing about, and to the relation of ideas within that field. More precise thinking about a subject will help our pupils to discover a possible organization of the whole 'body of thought' which has been covered in discussion and in getting up the material for writing.

We can define the aim of 'organization of thought' more closely by looking at it in this way : our purpose is to give our pupils help and practice in the marshalling of their ideas and words, in controlling and re-arranging them and ordering them so that they will lead to some significant conclusion. Their ideas are to be regarded by them as malleable material that has to be made to carry out certain tasks, or to achieve certain ends, such as to inform or persuade.

When these objectives have been decided upon, their purpose *must* be discussed with the pupils. At every step now there must be clear intentions and carefully thought out proposals, for these pupils should see exactly what is expected of them, and what they have to try to achieve. Perhaps it is best for them always to see their tasks as problems : "How does the writer marshal his thoughts ?"—"Does he work up to a climax, or does he state his conclusions first, and then give his reasons ?"—"In what

ways can language at the planning stage be made more effective ? ”—“ How can the material be more intelligently directed ? ”

Now if these pupils are to learn to order and control their material intelligently, limited objectives within the general aim of ‘the organization of thought’ must be considered. For the control of thought and the handling of language, training must be given in the selection of content and the use of appropriate diction ; and also training in controlling the order of facts, ideas, opinions, hypotheses and other items to be expressed ; so that, for instance, the effectiveness of an argument is heightened. There should be also some training in altering the proportions of the material collected in order to alter emphasis, or to increase force of persuasiveness, or to clarify the main lines of the thought. Some careful work on ‘Sequence’ and also on ‘Coherence’ is obviously called for in order to help the pupils to learn how to make an argument more succinct, more logical or in some other way more ‘telling.’ To plan written tasks with these more sharply focused objectives, and to test the compositions on their success in achieving them, will almost guarantee improvement !

The main principle which should guide our planning has been introduced earlier, though it is of more importance in this part of the course. It is that the arrangement and development of the thought of a piece of writing should be determined by the nature of the subject, and the purpose for which it is to be written. It is the teacher’s task to ensure that his pupils attend so closely to their subject and the purpose of the writing that the arrangement and the development of the theme grow out of those two overriding factors. For example, if the subject is a debatable one, the arrangement will normally take the *form* of a debate ;

and paragraph by paragraph one side of the argument may be put forward, and then in the same way the other side; or each paragraph may advance one argument, and each be followed by opposing reasons or evidence in the next paragraph. If the subject is the description of some process in a factory or workshop, or the functioning of some economic principle or social institution, the selection and order must be dictated by the nature of the process, by the inter-relationship of its parts and their relative importance. If the writer has chosen to prove some theory or defend some policy, then the form of the writing will normally be: statement of the theory, definition or explanation, its importance, evidence, examples, reasons, summing up. The true guide, then, and touchstone in the selection of material and in its arrangement is the subject itself. Thus the determining factor in 'composing' is the way the writer builds up and runs over his material in his mind before writing.

This is one of the important teachings of the Bergsonian philosophy: "Form is the punctilious servant of the idea."¹ Thus the particular conception of the subject that is developing in the mind of the writer as he collects his material in thought and imagination, and ponders on it, determines the general lines and arrangement of his theme. This principle calls for a more intelligent method than that which insists on a plan being prepared beforehand for every piece of written work. But the help that the pupils need is help in collecting material, in attending to its development and in *thinking*—not merely in planning. It is doubtful whether enough weight is usually given to the principle that 'form' is best determined by subject and purpose of writing. Yet without a clear conception of what

¹ *Creative Evolution.*

they are attempting, how can the majority of pupils do efficient work ?

It may be said that this principle is too difficult for the average pupil to apply ; but that would be wrong ; it is merely the conclusion of a teacher who under-rates the abilities of his pupils ; and so gives them instruction without stimulus and inspiration. The abilities of pupils at all levels are too often underestimated, and sometimes the work is made so easy for them that they cannot respond with any real effort, for it holds out to them no stimulating challenge. In the Upper School it is a feature of the finest teaching that the work is usually somewhat too difficult for the pupils. If a teacher has no faith in this, the least he could do would be to try it, or to plan part of the work of the Upper School to present certain difficulties to his pupils, and to challenge them to perform the tasks. The authority of John Dewey might be called in here to support this theory (and practice) : "A large part of the art of instruction lies in making the difficulty of new problems large enough to challenge thought, and small enough so that there shall be luminous spots from which helpful suggestions may spring." ¹

The syllabus of the work at this stage may be couched in formal terms, but in the work itself the expression of the pupils' interests and experiences must continue to receive encouragement. The syllabus already suggested will cover in general outline the selection of material and some different forms of arrangement, such as logical order, a general survey of a subject, and the handling of a number of particular examples as the basis of a general deduction. Some of these will be discussed here in fuller detail with descriptions of the method to be used ; but, as before, these are only to

¹ *The Philosophy of Education.*

serve as examples, and are not to be regarded as 'set' methods to be followed rigidly. Unfortunately, such an outline of the full procedure in the class-room must inevitably give only an approximation of the lively discussion and expression of ideas that can go on, and it cannot portray the gradual development of the work through all the adaptations that a good teacher makes to the response (or lack of response) of his class. Nevertheless these examples are given to show how some of the good qualities of composition may be achieved through the pupils' experimenting and enquiring, and as the result of their discoveries of what is good.

The view held here, then, is that senior pupils should be trained to select and develop a particular aspect of the subject that they have chosen. They should be taught that the selection of material and its arrangement must be determined solely by their individual conception of this aspect ; and they should be trained to rely on their own evolving conception of their subject to determine the form that their writing should take. If it is an argument, the writer must watch his 'pros' supporting his case, and then must see that his 'cons' either demolish one of his 'pros,' or throw a new light on the matter ; and he must note which of these two each 'con' does. If he is putting forward a case, he must examine each argument or piece of evidence to see how each advances his presentation—or does not ; he must determine whether he has used his fullest broadside at the beginning and has followed this by sufficient data to support it or whether he has used a delayed broadside. Similarly with narrative and accounts of events, reporting of happenings, explanations, all of which should have in themselves a logical series of connected items. The pupil has to be trained to watch the steps by which a story is

built up, noting the step that grows out of the previous one, carrying the story forward towards a final conclusion. The object of this kind of training is to give experience in developing a plan which arises out of its own inner purpose, instead of being squeezed into an external, superimposed scheme. A programme of this kind is ambitious, but the best pupils need something which does not merely inform and guide: they need methods and tasks which throw light on principles far beyond the scope of a single lesson. The poorer pupils will probably fail to achieve the high standard required, but nevertheless they are likely to do better than usual, because the more definite focus and the clearer objective, as well as the more exact and practical procedure, give them the kind of help and stimulus they need.

These things, of course, cannot be taught by giving instructions and explanations; that way of going to work destroys the pleasure that the pupils might have had in discovering things for themselves, and in accomplishing an exacting task, perhaps without help. If they themselves find out how to achieve, for instance, a logical plan or a well-arranged argument, and have come to this knowledge entirely through their own efforts, the conception will have grown from an embryo of an idea to a full and complete understanding. The knowledge therefore will be *theirs*; and as it will have been woven into their ways of working and into their ways of thinking, it will have given them special insight into the control of language and thought. It will be a living conception, capable of entering into other combinations of thought, and of wide application, not merely a verbal expression of an active conception. These pupils will have acquired a new technique, a mode of thinking about other forms of expression, and new

powers and experience of appreciating the intrinsic qualities of good prose : the teaching of composition on sound and thorough lines will help to develop the appreciation of literature.

Among *aids to reflection*, place the following maxim prominent : let distinction in expression advance side by side with distinction in thought.

S. T. COLERIDGE. *Aids to Reflection*.

Chapter 20

UPPER SCHOOL COMPOSITION : OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

But whatever foreign languages a Young Man meddles with (and the more he knows the better), that which he should critically study and labour to get a facility, clearness, and elegance to express himself in, should be his own, and to this purpose he should daily be exercised in it.

JOHN LOCKE. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education.*

The general method to be used at this stage should be informal and freely experimental ; but the objective for each task that the class is to attempt needs to be decided before the lesson gets under way, and as we have said, it should be explained to the class, and perhaps discussed. The part played by the teacher is largely that of a proposer of a problem, a chairman of a discussion, an assessor and socratic questioner. A problem, such as the writing of an informative article on recent developments in transport, is introduced and formulated ; it should then be looked at from different points, and some of the ways in which it might be tackled should be suggested by the class and criticized ; then a rough first draft might be made. If this appears promising, there can be a short period of questioning, which may lead to a discovery of principle, and to a clearer understanding of what may be done to improve the rough draft ; for instance, what may be done to make some of the arguments more emphatic and telling, what may be

done to make reasoning more practical, what examples might be introduced and for what purpose, e.g., "Do they make reasons clearer?" It is not always realized that most pupils have to learn things of this nature; very many have only the vaguest idea of how to set about the task of giving 'point' to an argument, of using evidence convincingly, of introducing quotation and example adroitly; and some pupils are quite ignorant of how to improve their own work.

Selection and Relevance. Work on selection of material and on the compiling of data ready for writing up will have been done lower down in the school, but now the compiling and sorting of facts, ideas, etc., must be worked at more carefully. Some classes, of course, will have mastered this aspect of composition, but many will not have done so; it is valuable for these less expert pupils to carry out some exercises in compiling and planning, without writing up the subjects worked on. It is then useful to go on to the compilation of notes which contain items that deflect the trend of the argument. The class can work at the same subject and on the same theme; each compiles an outline. The outlines can then be examined, and varying degrees of relevance may be discovered, or a side-step from the main line of thought may be detected, and perhaps the new line of thought traced to its source, and then to its conclusion. The difference that is made to the whole should be assessed by the class. The less able pupils need planned exercises of this kind in determining relevance, in weighing up the contribution of a paragraph or of an example to a whole passage. Without some kind of training like this they often include in their writings everything that occurs to them on the subject they are writing about. They have had no experience of reading themselves full, of dwelling on a subject in meditation, and finally selecting a central theme

and writing it up with the inclusion of only those notes and particulars that are relevant to that theme.

Another way for weaker pupils is to have the outlines compiled as before, and then to compare a number of these in pairs. The differences in handling and in the development of the main theme are discovered by the class ; and how some of those differences are caused by differences in selection of detail, can be seen by the dullest pupils by means of this comparison. Assessing the value of differences in the handling of a subject is a useful exercise as it brings into prominence the weaknesses as well as the strengths of successful writing ; it may also force a slow class to penetrate more deeply into a subject than would be done unaided, and to find significance in new directions ; and this is always good for the less able, because one of the main troubles of these pupils is that they do not search for the relations of a subject to other fields of thought and experience ; even at this stage we have to help many pupils to fill out their thin and superficial compositions.

Openings and Endings. This exercise, which is somewhat in the nature of an investigation, should normally come early in this part of the course. A good class will not require to follow it through to the end ; but a poor one will need much application of the lesson learnt. The task of investigating the ways in which writers begin and end their articles, reports, summaries and newspaper leaders, is proposed to the class. Then various types of beginnings and endings are collected from prose anthologies, essays, periodicals, etc. A brief note on the subject of each essay or article, and also on the general method of handling the subject should also be made. These notes and examples are brought to the next lesson, and are studied, discussed, and finally assessed. If possible, strong contrasts should be

brought to the notice of the less able pupils, and the different intentions of the writers should be determined exactly. It will be necessary for the pupils to distinguish the opening which aims at catching interest from one that goes straight to an important issue, relying on the interest of the subject to hold the reader's attention. These pupils need also to have practice in noting the difference between an opening paragraph that generalizes and one which arrives at a generalization after dealing with particular cases, and other differences too.

When some guiding principles have been discovered, such as the relation between the nature of the subject and the type of opening paragraph that is suitable and productive, or between the ending and the handling of the subject ; and when some critical decisions have been made, such as the kind of opening best suited to a subject or handling, the task becomes experimental : each member of the class composes some specimen openings or endings for some selected subjects, indicating in rough outline how each subject would be handled. Some of these are then criticized by the class, and if possible assessed. With a poor class it may be profitable to put emphasis on the kinds of openings that are undoubtedly inappropriate to certain types of subject.

The working with bad examples at this stage does not appear to have been thoroughly investigated ; indeed, perhaps many teachers do not believe in this kind of work. The written work in some schools is so good throughout that there is no need for 'cautionary' examples ; but where there is a lack of continuity in the teaching, or lack of agreement, or unclear conceptions of the exact nature of the task, some classes at this stage arrive at such superficial and rigidly formal ideas of 'school compositions' that

only a study of ineffectiveness and 'of-what-not-to-do' will convince them of the need for a change of opinion, or will help them to realize what high standards can be achieved by them in the presentation of their thoughts and knowledge.

Too many of our pupils have suffered from the deadly and deadening infliction of having to write 'school compositions' for no other reason than that the task is 'set'; they have never had their interest in writing aroused; they have never experimented with language to find out what kinds of effect can be produced, or to find out what they think by setting down their own thoughts on paper; and they have never been trained to clarify their thoughts by writing them down on paper.

Logical Order. What is 'Logical Order'? Is it a series of sentences arranged in an order so that each will be closely associated in meaning with the next? Is it a purely verbal order, or have the ideas to follow by deduction or implication from previous sentences? Is it *any* association of word meanings, or only a reasoned association? Obviously more than a simple association of meanings of sentences is required for Logical Order, and thought processes involving deduction and induction are brought into play when a logically well-knit piece of writing is being composed. It appears that a knowledge of Logic is not required, but practical exercises in Logic might help a writer. However, there is simpler kind of logical order that the weaker members of the higher forms in a secondary school can keep to and can master. It is the logical order of cause and effect in everyday life—the logic of events and the natural behaviour of things. These are the ideas that should form the introduction to Logical Order for the less gifted.

An average class on the Upper School may never have discovered that there is a need to clarify ideas on this

subject. And not many will have given any thought at all to the logical order of events, simple cause and effect in a material world, and the logic of the ways of things that force us to act in response in one way rather than another—the inescapable logic of natural objects and occurrences, stubborn, unavoidable and unanswerable, as Dr. Johnson demonstrated. It would arouse much curiosity in almost every form to hear the teacher of English introducing a composition lesson with suggestions about the indestructibility of matter, the fact of mass occupying space, gravitation, the varying degrees of affinity between various elements ; but those who have tried it, even on a quite elementary level, will be struck by the sudden increase of quiet attention : it is possible that such an introduction awakens the older pupils to a realization that the science that they have been learning is not just stuff out of a book, or the occult knowledge of science teachers, but is of general interest to everyone, and has a close relation to the lives of every person ? At any rate such experiments which introduce topics that a class has been working at in other lessons always seems profitable.

This part of the course then may open with a discussion, and such questions as the above may be proposed from the desk, and handled freely by the class. The stimulation of deeper thought and enquiry into scientific theory and into logic, religion, linguistics and philosophy must be the leading policy at the top of the school, as it is in all the best schools.

The next step may be to set a task in which the writers will have to choose one of a number of trains of thought, or ways of handling a discussion on some theory, policy in government or administration, or philosophy. Instead of a discussion preceding the writing, now the writing

might be done first, and some of the results used to bring out successes and failures in achieving different forms of logical development. An exchange of books for a critical exercise in discovery of the steps in the argument might precede the discussion of the writings produced. For a less able class, a theme, such as the explanation of some fairly complex process, or the summarizing of plot and sub-plots of a play, might be discussed ; the focus being on the order of incident in the total action and on the points at which each subordinate item or sub-plot affects the main process or action. Plans and diagrams set out on the board are necessary for the weakest classes ; these find subjects like the manufacture of coal gas and its by-products, or some other industrial process, are sufficiently exacting. Something too might be done with the stories and accounts of witnesses in a witness-box, or for still weaker classes, the re-telling of stories of some complexity, where for instance there is concurrent action. The Father Brown or Sherlock Holmes stories are short enough for this purpose and might be successful in bringing home to the less gifted pupils the necessity for one order rather than another.

Other sources of material for this work are the summaries of plays to be found in many editions of plays, Lamb's Tales, and possibly passages of Saxo Grammaticus, or Holinshed and North's Plutarch, relevant to the Shakespeare plays being read that year. Some of these last three would provide special interest to many classes. All these sources and summaries can be tested critically, and the order of the events and omissions in them compared to those in the relevant play. A really good class can attack the problem of the novelist's art, and can work on the plots of the novels that have been read recently, with some simple criticism,

for instance, on *The Turn of the Screw*. A not too sophisticated class could begin on some straightforward detective novels, *At the Villa Rose*, by A. E. W. Mason, or Bentley's *Trent's Last Case*, for instance, and could examine the order in which the items of evidence are introduced to the reader.

Two points may be noted about this work : discussion may bring to light the fact that logical order is affected by the purpose of the writer, so that discussion should bring out those special intentions which have influenced the ordering of a plot or argument. The second point is that there must be some practice in applying some of the different types of logical order that the class has discovered.

Arrangement. The next part of the course might be concerned with some of the various forms of arrangement that can be used in stating a case, in persuasion and in the handling of evidence to support an argument or prove a theory. Some conception of proportion in a long piece of writing should be arrived at, and as a lack of proportion will sometimes appear in the writing of some of the best pupils, some attention should usually be given to this aspect of the work.

It is very effective if the less able pupils can be brought to produce a piece of writing that obviously has good proportion ; having achieved that in their work without previous instruction, they understand what is required far better than if they are given advice and example first. This can be done by calling for a short article on three successive occasions, each on one aspect of the same subject, all more or less the same length, for instance, 'Preparations for Acting a Play,' 'The Task of the Producer,' and 'The Dress Rehearsal.' These three articles are then put together, linked up, and then if necessary slightly reduced in length

the coherence tightened up and the whole polished : thus a rounded-off article with equal proportions will have been produced by each member of the class. By producing it in sections the pupils are able to handle the smaller sections with a more intelligent grasp, and without getting lost in a great amount of detail, or in a subject that is too wide for them.

Another way of working at the problem of proportion with inexpert pupils is to call for rough drafts of two or three subjects, or merely for draft outlines ; and when produced, the weight of each part or each main point is considered and decided upon. It may be best to review the weight and the fullness of each main argument at the outset in the planning and rough draft stage, though it is sometimes more effective for the inexpert pupil to see where the weakness lies by examining the completed writing, and to suggest what should have been done to avoid it, though this plan is not the best for the weakest pupils. One reason for advocating it is that so often instructions and explanations are not easily converted into actual procedure by the inexpert ; so that the understanding of the *idea* of proportion may not help him at all when the writing is being done. Another reason is that the good examples that are often used for instructional purposes in the teaching of composition are often so far beyond the scope and ways of thinking of the pupil that they have no effect on his language habits or on his writing of composition.

It is likely that classes that are not very skilful in producing well-shaped and well-ordered written work should spend plenty of time in making and discussing plans for different kinds of composition, many of which will not be fully written up, as the value of this exercise is in the planning, not in the full expression of the ideas. In the

discussion of these plans the class may see what the possibilities are, how one proceeds to compile a thorough study of a subject, and how one relates a subject to relevant aspects of other subjects, to aspects of everyday life, for instance, of industry, travel, or how one relates a subject to other problems, for instance, of social service, government, commerce, finance. One reason for lack of skill at this stage seems to be that many pupils have not had sufficient practice in relating various types of subject to a wide variety of human activities ; their written work therefore is too thin and too commonplace. The inevitable result of these weaknesses is that their language and handling of a theme are nearly always feeble or erratic. To remedy this failure in language and in mental activity much practice in handling varied themes must be given, and much discussion of ways of developing and planning themes, always with probing questions to train the pupil to search more deeply into his subject.

There are many other kinds of arrangement that may be worked at in this part of the course : the handling of a debatable subject, of an article intended to persuade, of a critical article in which the objections of an opponent are met : all these might produce useful discussion, and then different kinds of arrangement according to subject, intention or outlook. These pupils might also attempt a survey of recent opinion on some topic or of a recent event of importance, or an editorial, a leading article, or a commentary on policy or on current affairs.

The point to be made here is that most classes need practice and precise training in the handling of different kinds of writing. The school 'essay' is only one type, and normally too artificial to have much effect on pupils' command of language, or on their ability to produce

something worth reading—though many people would say that that was asking too much !

Unity. Few pupils know exactly how they should give consideration to this topic during the actual process of writing. Sometimes, however, it is sufficient merely to make use of questions such as : “ Is this point about the subject or not ? ” or : “ Is this fact you have brought in here strictly relevant ? ” Sometimes a critical discussion is effective. But with most classes it is necessary to deal with this point either by helping them to apply criteria to their own writing, or by setting them the task of constructing draft outlines with an obvious continuity and prominent main theme. Some useful training can be given by dealing orally with the *précis* of some cogent piece of writing, and by discussing the comparative relevance and prominence made by the writer, and finally by assessing the degree of unity achieved by him. The purpose of the writer and his attitude of mind towards reader and subject must be deduced to make it possible to arrive at agreed decisions on continuity and unity ; this gives the unskilled pupils a further valuable exercise in comprehension and intelligent reading—an opportunity to be seized upon always.

The mention of *Précis* brings another point to the fore : that this exercise should not be yet another mechanical task, a mere formal exercise for training the mind (as it is supposed), but should be proposed always as a means of achieving some end, such as further clarity, a stricter unity, or a more striking effect. A discussion might often change into an enquiry : “ Has this passage a strict unity or not ? Let us apply the test of *précis*.” Or “ Should these arguments in this article have priority ? A careful *précis* will show us the answer.”

The ideal is for the class always to find its own solution, to apply its own tests, to learn independence, and so to acquire confidence in the mastery and manipulation of language—and of thought. For these reasons and for the great need always to make the work purposeful, realistic and satisfying, the tasks that all types of Upper School classes should be attempting should be the kind that have a usefulness in business, commerce, entertainment, learning and government. Thus the class would normally be producing articles, reports, summaries, surveys, etc. for Book Reviews, Reader's Digests, Interviews, Results of Investigations, Descriptions of Experiments, Reports of Research, Eye-Witness's Narratives, Commentators' Accounts, Film Critics' Columns, and so on—not merely 'The School Essay,' however perfect.

A word more must be said about the discovery of principle. It is an essential part of the method recommended here that the pupils themselves should perceive the *need* for such qualities as logical order, unity, form growing out of the nature of the subject. If they find that they have unintentionally achieved logical order in a piece of writing, or a close-knit unity, they will be proud of that achievement, and consequently will be determined to achieve it again and again ; and they will also feel confident in themselves that they can arrive at certain standards of excellence. This pride in achievement and confidence in one's powers, this understanding of the ways in which the craftsman sets to work, this command of the simple techniques of writing and composition, and this insight into principle : these are the things that we have to work towards. These will enable the learners to go far, and to continue their progress long after they have completed their school course.

Sir Joshua Reynolds once asked him by what means he had attained his extraordinary accuracy and flow of language. He told him that he had early laid it down as a fixed rule to do his best on every occasion, and in every company . . . and that by constant practice, and never suffering any careless expressions to escape him, or attempting to deliver his thoughts without arranging them in the clearest manner, it became habitual to him.

BOSWELL. *The Life of Dr. Johnson.*

Chapter 21

PRÉCIS-WRITING

A strict and succinct style is that where you can take away nothing without loss, and that loss to be manifest.

BEN JONSON. *Timber.*

The teaching of précis-writing is considered by many inspiring teachers to be a mechanical and therefore an unsatisfactory part of their work. But the mental skill or ability that a training in précis-writing can develop is a most valuable one: it is one that is a characteristic of the greatest minds. The power of grasping the essence of a speech or piece of writing, to note what is important and what unimportant, and to estimate the degree of relatedness to the central theme of the facts and ideas expressed is a valuable ability, and it can be acquired. So that the development of this power should be a major concern of education.

The teaching of précis-writing obviously is not merely to enable children to reduce the length of a passage of prose (or fine poetry, one must regretfully include); but to give them help and practice in seizing the gist of a passage, and therefore in comprehension, in noting relevance and in judging the degree of importance of ideas and facts. The writing of provisional drafts and final versions also gives some training in expression, in ordering and arranging material and in the careful 'management of language,' as De Quincey expressed it.

The subject must be regarded mainly, and certainly in the first stage of each task in précis-writing, as an exercise

in the handling of facts and ideas ; and not as a juggling of words and phrases, or as a squeezing of the extract of three or more gobbets into a tube capable of holding only one. The main effort, therefore, should be exerted during the initial stages of the work ; and time must be spent on the class finding answers to such questions as : " What exactly is the passage about ? "—" What is the main theme running through it ? " And when these questions have been correctly answered : " What is the most important idea ? " First, then, we seek for the general purport, next for the precise subject and intention of the writer, and then examine the passage line by line to discover the main thread of thought, weighing up the ideas, their relevance and importance.

We see, therefore, that the exercise is one of judgment, logic and comprehension, a simple one if the passage is simple and the subject familiar ; but difficult for the senior pupils who have to work at complicated passages or those which penetrate deeply into a subject, or are very wide in scope. Thus at this early stage, there is no discussion about the number of words in the final version, or whether this word or that, this reference or that, should be included in the final version.

Now, many books on *précis*-writing emphasize the necessity for reading the passage several times ; but it is not easy for a pupil to give his attention to the exact meaning of a passage in a third reading, or even in a second one, when he has gathered a rough general idea at the first ; nevertheless he will find it easier to concentrate on it if he knows discussion will follow after the reading. So too it is generally fairly easy for a pupil to determine the main purport of a passage ; but not easy to note the continuous thread of thought running through it, or to detect a new

strand of thought that is being spun on to the main thread. So that here again, a discussion at this point helps the weaker pupils to perceive the general trend of the argument. A discussion is for the purpose of driving the pupils to attend to the main theme and to the continuity of it through the passage ; it forces them to attend closely to what the writer has actually written (and this is always a valuable discipline for all of us). The pupils may then be called upon to state their findings, to give evidence for this from the text, and to support a case against other claims. The discussion therefore is one of the most important activities of the lesson, for rival opinions act as a challenge, enforcing without the teacher's participation, clarity of thought and more soundness of judgment.

Once the main topic and the central theme running through the passage have been determined, the chief difficulty has been cleared away. Then comes the training in determining relevance and logical continuity : each sentence or clause, or fact is weighed up against the full title to see if it contributes to it or not. If the class decides that it contributes some item or information or idea, then it is written down ready for the final unifying summary. The competition to prove that each item does or does not add something to the main thread, and to floor a class-mate by some uncontrovertible evidence, provides a simple challenge for all. The training that discussion of this sort gives, in determining relevance and proportion, and in precise comprehension, is exactly what is needed by the more senior classes of a secondary school.

So the whole passage is examined sentence by sentence, and the outline summary compiled. It is advisable to have this summary studied again, item by item, each in relation to the main theme, to decide upon the best order of the

parts. This would normally be a logical order, though the arrangement of the original may well be otherwise if the writer's intention had been persuasion or entertainment or the expression of some emotion. If the passage is purely factual, or if the purpose of a précis of a piece of emotive writing is to be a distillation solely of the intellectual, objective meaning, then in both cases the form of the original should be completely ignored, and the information presented in the most logical form possible. For instance, if an original sets out causes first and conclusion last, it will sometimes be clearer if the argument is inverted, thus : "X occurred for the following reasons . . ." When going through the summarized items for decisions on order and arrangement, it is sometimes advisable to review each of the accepted points, and to weed out those which appear to be of minor importance ; this is usually necessary when summarizing long or complicated argument, pleading, description, reasoning. Again, this will provide a useful task in a strict training of the fertile, or inconstant, minds in the Upper School. The final expression of all these carefully selected and re-arranged points in a continuous piece of writing gives good practice in marshalling reasons, causes, conditions, etc., and in the simple handling of evidence.

But we must go back and describe with more exact detail the actual procedure of weighing up each item against the full title, for failure to carry out precisely the two crucial stages in the method, will turn the exercise into a mechanical task, and will not give the pupils this infallible clue to selection. The first critical point where exactness and completeness *must* be secured is the discovery of the main core of thought running through the passage. Next, the expression in words of this central theme needs to be

altered, added to or pruned, until both the complete theme and the most important aspects of it are contained in some short phrases which are in effect a comprehensive title of the passage. This full title, which is the essence and central thought of the passage, is to serve as the touchstone in the second critical stage of the work, so that unless it is accurate and complete, it cannot provide a clear and correct answer when each item is being weighed up. Time, therefore, must be spent in thrashing out the content and exact scope of the main theme, and the best form of words to express these. The reason why this stage is so important is that the determining of the central core of thought is the crux of the problem ; and to find the solution demands exact comprehension, a sense of proportion and a keen judgment. It is a distillation of the meaning of the whole.

The second critical stage is, as we have said, the using of this comprehensive title as the criterion to determine which of the facts, ideas, arguments, in the passage are closely related to the main theme, and are necessary to it. The actual procedure, therefore, is for the class to pick out each subordinate fact or point (or sentence, from full-stop to full-stop), and to weigh it up against the comprehensive title, answering such questions as : " Does this fact tell us something important about what is expressed in this title ? "—" Does it contain some idea that is part of this main theme ? "—" Does it add some detail that is necessary to this main theme that is expressed in this comprehensive title ? " The complete passage is worked through in this way, step by step, and the subordinate ideas and facts not contributing to the main theme are weeded out. Thus we are left with only the important steps in an argument, or in dealing with other subjects, with only the main points of a piece of reasoning, or the

main events of a campaign, or the main causes of a change in policy.

We see, then, that this part of the work gives practice in determining logical relevance. It is an intellectual exercise enforcing an exact focus on each item and a simple decision in easy, practical logic. And as the written word is all the time in front of the pupils, and is definite and objective, every pupil should be able to form an opinion concerning the logical relevance of each item, and to maintain that opinion in discussion.

After the collection of notes, or the outline summary, has been scrutinized, re-organized and perhaps once more thinned out, the final stage of writing up the notes into a continuous passage provides effective practice in achieving continuity of thought and expression, in subordinating ideas and facts by the use of participial phrases and clauses, and in the general ordering and arrangement of the material selected for the final version. And success is almost assured because of the earlier attention to relevance and relative importance of each item.

In this final writing up are the original words to be retained? We have seen that the sequence, the paragraph structure and the proportions of the original may be completely disregarded, though in working on a very well-balanced and logical piece of prose, these may be very similar in the final summarized version; but the vocabulary of the final version may be the same as the vocabulary of the original or not, according to the needs of economy or clarity or exactness; there is no need to change the words if they are felt to be exactly expressive of the thought of the original: this is *précis*-writing, not paraphrasing.

But what should a writer do if he believes the reasoning is loose or finds a *non-sequitur*, or if he finds an incorrect

fact? Is he to introduce his own knowledge, to improve the reasoning or to add value judgments? He might feel very strongly about something: "But the world is *not* flat!" He might find that a *non-sequitur* was central to the original writer's exposition, and feel compelled to remove it. Is the pupil simply to accept everything and summarize it, however illogical or nonsensical? Normally, pupils in school should no doubt be trained simply to *distil the meaning*—that excellent way of expressing the exact nature of the task might be drilled quietly into them. They should therefore not add anything of their own, or correct or improve; though if they were trained to add critical footnotes that would be excellent.

The Purpose of a Précis. Instead of going blindly on, the intelligent teacher will soon realize that the passages often set for précis exercises that he finds in books and examination papers are not suitable for the kind of treatment that is suggested there. For instance, passages from Bacon's *Essays*, Hamlet's soliloquies, Addison's *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*, Browne's *Religio Medici* are not at all suitable for reduction, yet these have appeared in précis-writing books published during the last ten years. The best guide in selecting passages for précis for a compiler of extracts or examination questions might be: "Will a summary of the main points serve any useful purpose?"—"Will it improve the expression of the thought, make it more effective or clearer?" This gives us the key to the secret of making précis-work profitable: set only those passages that can be of *some use* to the pupils. For instance, most of the précis work of the Upper School, or Upper Middle, should be précis of chapters in their textbooks that they have to use for 'additional reading,' or of books that will increase their knowledge of some subject on the

curriculum (but not English Literature), or of articles in periodicals dealing with subjects they are studying in school. The value of such work to the pupil, the certainty of their learning the skill of efficient summarizing, and the simplicity of the method are all so obvious that it is strange that it is not the common practice in all schools.

Similarly, summaries of public lectures given in the school or locally, of articles in periodicals and in children's magazines that would widen their interests and knowledge, are suitable material for *précis*-work. In using these there would be no need to point the moral, the obvious gain and value would secure the immediate interest and attention.

The Place of Précis in the School Syllabus. Training in pruning and summarizing can begin quite early in the secondary school course, provided there is some reasonable motive for producing a reduced version of the matter. The most obvious occasion will be the reducing and re-writing of contributions made by the class to their own Form Magazine. So often in the early stages of a project, where compositions are written independently, the pupils' descriptions, articles, their stories and plays, will be not "Some deymtee thing," but verily "prose doggerel" with strings of detail without importance to the story and obviously holding up the action. It is an easy matter to elect Form Editorial Boards and to set blue pencils going, with every member busily weeding rank growth or thinning out prolific seedlings. It is often best at this stage not to have a re-casting of the story in other words, but to keep the work as simple as possible by having only deletions of words, phrases and sentences; thus keeping the exercise as one of discarding superfluous details and expression, and not aiming to make it an expression exercise as well.

Further up the school, the compilation of articles—'How

it works,' 'How to make it,' 'How to do it'—will give ample opportunity for the exercise of the skill of selection, and later of re-casting in more pointed and appropriate expression. It is always worth while pushing a project on to its final stage of a filled exercise book or bound loose-leaf volume, covered or bound by the pupils themselves (and if good enough presented to the school library, or placed in the form library).

In the Upper School, the tasks must be more serious ; but they might begin with the reduction of the various productions of a class to the compass, say, of the school magazine, for this will help the weaker pupils (who need nearly all the attention at this stage) to see what is required and the condition of the work. It would, however, be better usually to bring a little more sophistication into the work by planning, for instance, an imaginary "Reader's Digest" or a descriptive library or museum catalogue, so that the pupils have a definite guide and touchstone for the selection and re-casting of the matter of each article. Some Sixth Forms can even be persuaded to produce thin, eclectic volumes of "Criticisms of Recent Literary Productions," which actually might summarize all they had collected about their set books, and which they had written 'as if' the literary works had just appeared. Similar exercises with the intention of compiling volumes of 'Collected Essays' can be planned to produce summaries of criticisms on the set books, e.g. a volume of criticisms on the Shakespeare plays that are being studied, or on Milton's epics ; the search for these criticisms must of course be made by the senior pupils themselves, though some of these may need advice on the books to go to. With the less able classes, simpler tasks must be planned, such as the writing of scenarios of plays and operas for theatre programmes, for

broadcasting magazines or for the announcers of programmes, or even for a more junior form textbook. If a specimen of such a textbook is brought to a lesson and used for criticism as well as for an example, the effect will be excellent. Similar volumes on parallel lines may be planned for Science Sixths, if their syllabus has been wisely enough devised to include some work on the efficient handling of their mother tongue and on the presentation of facts, theories and experiments in economical and precise language.

Some Sixth Forms are required to buy and bring to school a copy of a current periodical, such as *The Listener*, or *The Geographical Magazine*, and to work over one or two of the more valuable articles, extracting the main information and then discussing the main argument. This is an excellent plan, but could be more frequently used, especially if articles are produced from learned magazines, for these throw new or unexpected light on subjects being studied in school, and always seem to have a striking effect. Indeed, nothing appears to stir the efforts of senior pupils, and even rapidly maturing Middle School pupils, and to win their co-operation so much as work on an actual publication and on something clearly of importance outside school ; as that wise educationist, Mr. J. Fairgrieve used to point out : "Children come to school not to learn what is inside it, but to learn about the world of things and people that they have left *outside*."

It would indeed have a more lasting effect on senior pupils' work and minds, if whole forms undertook to produce articles for publication in popular educational and 'hobbies' magazines and similar periodicals, and if they would present them for publication, than to go on always with the traditional 'essay-writing,' which all too often concentrates on conventional subjects about which the

pupils have only book-knowledge, or no true interest. Well-intentioned teachers still believe that examiners demand (and like) the stiff formal and 'general' essay; though for years examiners have been giving good marks and high praise at examiners' meetings (with practising teachers present) to fresh, personal and lively compositions, and examining boards have been reporting for years to schools how acceptable these are.

The Nature of the Material to be summarized. We have dealt with the use of a criterion for selecting detail, with précis being used for a practical purpose, and now we come to another guide in selecting facts and ideas, and one which also helps to develop intellectual judgment and a sense of logical relevance.

The guide that will be of special help to the beginner, rather than to the older pupil, is a clear understanding of the exact nature of the material to be summarized. When the beginner notes that the material is narrative, he will see that action or character must be picked out of its background of description or out of a delineation of the social setting. Whereas, when he notes that the material is descriptive, he learns that he must look for the most telling words, phrases and expressions. So he learns that when working on historical passages, he may have to rake through many paragraphs in order to gather suggestions of causes or results, or the main developments of the events presented. If the matter is scientific, or linguistic or social theory, then precise explanations and concise evidence or reasoning may have to be lifted out of a discursive exposition of the subject.

During the discussion after the first readings, therefore, it will be necessary for the class to come to a decision about the nature of the material. With less able classes some questions must be posed to help the pupils to discover first

the nature of the material and then the kind of item to be selected. Thus, if working on narrative: "Should any description be included in the final version, if so, what?"—"What character description must be included?"—"What are the main steps in the action?" With a more senior class, the enquiry might examine the relative importance of cause and motive in an historical passage. So, with other kinds of material, the question will be: "What shall we look for when a passage is description (or exposition, criticism, argument)?"—"What *kind* of fact, information, opinion, idea, is likely to be important?" The directing of enquiry like this will do more to help those who need help than hours of explaining and practice. The teacher might perhaps be warned to make sure that the material selected for a factual and logical analysis is of the expository type and information-giving, for in this work at first the average pupil must not be faced with debatable points, such as: should the expression of the writer's opinion be included?

At a later stage the more advanced classes will discover that some writers have more than one purpose in writing, and that there is more in a passage than the expression of information or persuasion by logical argument. So that when the pupils have treated a passage as a factual exposition, and have found that there is much left over that they have not selected, the question: "What is missing?" will often disclose some of these other purposes, such as opinion, humour, satire, irony, political bias; and so this may lead on to some simple summing up of a writer's intention, and then to some simple interpretation, and finally to a criticism of passages with very similar purposes and subject. By placing the two side by side, the similarities of intention and execution, and some assessment of the success of each, can usually be discovered by those who most need help.

It is likely that criticism should be restricted to points of this kind with poor classes and with beginners, and perhaps too for some time, as criticism in the hands of young critics can so easily go astray.

With classes that have not made much success of interpretation, it would be better to have each pupil place his condensed version of a story or other material side by side with the original, and to compare the two carefully. The comparison can be furthered by getting the pupils to answer such questions as: "What is lost (or gained) in the reduced version?"—"Is the story as convincing in the shortened version?"—"Is the excitement retained in the shorter version?"—"Is it just as interesting, and if not, why not?" As the pupils are now working over their own productions, and on passages they have read several times, they should find little difficulty in answering questions like these; and in producing evidence for their answers and opinions, they gain insight into what is a good précis, which is a valuable gain.

It might be worth while to note how this kind of critical comparison leads on to other useful training in developing other abilities. The work of a senior class, for instance, may lead to a comparison of two differently expressed versions of the same argument, to an appreciation of the clarity of a theory, an assessment of the weight of a reason or the validity of an intellectual position, or more simply, the cogency of an argument. The questions to direct the enquiry to help the uninitiated might be: "Is this argument for the case, or that one, of greater weight?"—"Is this piece of evidence more convincing than that?" Similarly, in handling historical themes, the relative importance of several causes will come up for review. With literary criticism, the excellence of the critical article can be assessed;

"Has the writer brought good evidence for each of his criticisms? Has he dealt fairly with good and with bad qualities?"—"Has he put forward detailed points, or has he dealt only with general traits and features of style?"

The establishing of good standards of criticism and good habits in reading literature follow when a class is interested in this work, and tackles it with success; or when a teacher leads a class to get to grips with exact details in a text, and admits no shirking in the search for precision.

From this account of special ways of handling *précis*-writing, it will be seen that this kind of work may have little value as 'expression-work'; but the training it provides in the management of fact and idea is exceptionally valuable, and in few kinds of exercise can there be such clear-cut decisions made by a class, such objective assessment of the weight of some argument or piece of evidence, and such precisely logical application of easily handled criteria. *Précis*, carried out on these lines, gives an exercise both simple and exacting, and at the same time it supplies a technique in that most difficult but essential intellectual procedure: the determination of relevance.

. . . to weed out that, that is superfluous and idle, not onelie where wordes be vainlie heaped one upon another, but also where many sentences, of one meaning, be so clouted up together as though *M. Hall* had been, not writing the story of England, but varying a sentence in *Hitching schole*: surelie a wise learned man, by this way of *Epitome*, in cutting away wordes and sentences, and diminishing nothing at all of the matter, should leave to men's use, a storie, half as much as it was in quantitie, but twice as good as it was, both for pleasyre and also commoditie.

ROGER ASCHAM. *The Scholemaster*.

How to boil down so many facts in the alembic, so that the distilled result, the produced appearance, should have intensity, lucidity, brevity, beauty, all the merits required for my effect ?

HENRY JAMES. *Preface to Roderick Hudson.*

Chapter 22

THE VALUE OF 'EXPRESSION' TO THE CHILD

Linguistic training has a certain specific psychological function which no education can dispense with and for which nothing else can be substituted.

F. C. S. SCHILLER. *The Pragmatic Value of a Liberal Education.*

We come now to the last important aspect of our subject : its deeper values. At its best, as the boy moves up the school, at first struggling to make up boys' school stories or gangster episodes, then writing about his hobbies or other interests in his second year, writing contributions to his form 'mag.' in his third, describing his exploits with scenery or 'noises off' at a school play in his fourth, and arguing forcibly in his fifth about his favourite game or the obscurer techniques of model-making or river fishing, he gradually learns to handle his mother tongue and his pen with some facility. If he has been made to write regularly and often, and has been inspired (or cajoled) to write freely and with keenness, and has then been persuaded to write (or drummed into writing) to a more and more exacting standard, he will have attained to some small mastery of language. And his composition course, as he moved up from one form to another, will have gradually exerted a disciplinary effect on his writing and on his thinking. The very process of working at the expression of his ideas, his thoughts, interests, beliefs, experiences, and sometimes his feelings, too, on a variety of subjects and for a number of different purposes,

will gradually discipline his mental activity and also the conceptions that will have sometimes resulted from it.

Before trying to explain what is meant here by 'discipline' we must realize that a disciplinary effect does not result from all expression and composition. No claim whatsoever can be made that the everyday expression of our needs, our commonplace interests, and all our daily exchange of small-talk and social chatter, can exert any discipline of any sort on our thinking or on our use of language. Expression of that kind, inevitable as it is, is merely imitative and repetitive; the mind does not *exert* itself, and therefore no discipline results. In that kind of expression, the governing factors are: the line of least resistance, and the need for either economy and immediacy, or for an unimpeded flow of talk.

Similarly, re-telling what has been said to us, telling someone some information gathered from a book, copying down in our own words what a lecturer has said, and all other forms of paraphrase which is an approximation to the thought and content of an original, are merely silhouettes, shadows or skeletons of the main idea of the originals. It is only when the paraphraser strains to catch the ideas and content of an original *with precision and fullness* in some other form of expression that any discipline will result from such activities. But as this effort is so rarely exacted by a teacher, and so rarely needed, one can safely say that paraphrasing nearly always fails to give any value at all. Though it must be noted that at our younger pupils' level, their stumbling efforts and even their poorer achievements may have resulted from a striving on their part, and therefore for them their tasks may have some disciplinary effect.

So we see that it is only when the mind works over what it has to express, and when it exerts itself to express something

precisely, that it receives the benefit of any discipline. There is this benefit too when the mind is engaged in throwing ideas into new combinations, new arrangements, and fitting them out with specially appropriate or expressive words, or finding sharper, clearer words for them; but always there must be a tasking of the mind—the mind struggling to achieve something which it cannot do easily.

But *how* does language discipline our minds? There is not a simple answer to this question. But let us examine one or two of the more manageable ideas concerning the ways in which a discipline works. The most obvious result of writing out what one has in mind is that the written word forces the writer to perceive more clearly what exactly he *has* in mind, because “No one can be sure of the details of what he thinks until he sees what he has written.”¹ This effect of drawing attention to details may be disciplinary, because though many of us are often sure enough about our general themes for a speech or article, we do not remember how unruly details may be, but by writing we can know them more exactly.

But we can go further than that: sometimes the written word *reveals* to us what we have been thinking. So we see that writing can be most valuable to all of us personally, quite apart from the learning of composition, and whether we are professional writers or not. Writing out an argument or piece of reasoning, too, enables us to make sure whether or not a deduction necessarily follows from some premises, or that one's ideas are logically in sequence, or are not. So it is extremely profitable to write down the sequence, and to note each of the steps of the argument or reasoning. So, too, we can discipline our ideas and make them more suitable to an audience if we first write them down.

¹ I. G. WEIGHTMAN. *On Language and Writing*.

We hear, however, the question: "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" repeated at educational conferences as a joke to liven up the dull platitudes and empty generalizations; but the power of giving our mental activities some form or degree of objectivity, as we have in writing, is a great gain to every thinker and speaker, for then alterations and improvements can be made, the written thought can be weighed up, assessed, and if necessary modified. This opportunity of improving our thoughts of making them more precise and truer, and also of developing them, is the discipline which is essential to the growing mind if progress is to continue. So the first gain that discipline brings is a greater exactitude and clearer definition of what we have in mind.

This formulating of our thought in words, and altering the words in order to achieve clarity, truth and precision, not only makes the thought clearer to us, and so in all likelihood to a reader; but it clears up some of the thinking that has led up to that thought, for we should realize that "unclear masses of mental content characterize much of the more rudimentary mental operations";¹ so that the mere fact of getting some mental content into words clears away a lot of loose and vague thinking, and it gives the mind something objective and definite that it can focus on. It also gives it this objective focus to lead off from, as from a spring-board, to another idea, thus initiating a line of consecutive thought. Unfortunately, only too often we are not strongly enough aware that some particular thinking is unclear, or that we have already left the logical position that we put into words some little time previously. We should realize that our conceptions and ideas are very often not born complete or in a presentable form for communi-

¹ W. B. PILLSBURY and MEADER. *The Psychology of Language*.

cating to a listener or reader ; for in much of our thinking we are only *becoming* aware of what our minds are weaving. In our waking hours the tapestry of our thoughts does not *unroll*, it is woven, and the weave contains the threads of all that has gone before, and therefore there are often issues that we do not see, for we cannot view the pattern whole and completed, but only a piece of it at a time, as it grows. Only when we find words for a small piece of the moving pattern can we prevent an idea from being woven into a new design that is already beginning to show itself, and from being lost, perhaps for ever, as a *separate* object for our contemplation, for the new design would absorb the idea.

Next we might ask : how is it that this clarity and more exact definition of our thoughts is brought about by expression in language ? On this point, Coleridge gives us the clue, as so often : once when he wrote to Wordsworth, he referred to " Thoughts that obey no mastery of words." Whatever arrives at consciousness in our minds does not always arrive in nicely formulated sentences or in some form of perfect expression. Thoughts, impressions, have to fit themselves out with those words that the speaker or writer happens to have available at the time. Then those words pin down and enclose our thoughts by their meanings ; they master our thoughts, control them, dictating limits to them. This gives our thoughts form and clarity. For nearly all thought without expression in words (or some other medium) is nebulous and unstable ; but expression in words controls it and circumscribes its meanings by limiting them to what the chosen sentence-pattern can carry—or 'express,' and so the thought cannot any longer change itself or become nebulous, for it is caught in that sentence, and so disciplined.

So a piece of the continuously changing pattern of our

thoughts can be caught with clear definition only by a fixed pattern of words. It can be changed only if the thinker changes the words. Thus our thoughts have to obey the dictates of words, if they are to be communicable. Our minds and our thinking habits are the better for this disciplining. And when words have made our thoughts obey their forms, and patterns, and when these coincide exactly with the meanings of the words used to express them, then they are clear to us, effective and of value to other people. Without the mastery of words they are private and uncommunicable, like a private poem; and often they are only partly known to the thinker himself. To be useful and operative, our thoughts must obey and be disciplined by words. And so in education our pupils must learn to express what they have in mind, and must be trained to find words that will order their thoughts, and discipline their ideas, their impressions, their imaginings and all their mental activities, so that these can play an active pragmatic part in the pupils' growth and in their daily lives within the social circles in which they move.

Then, as a pupil gradually learns to make proper use of an ever increasing vocabulary, he learns how to seize more and more of his thoughts, before they slip away unformulated into forgetfulness, and he learns how to master more difficult or elusive thought by understanding the words that express them, as he grows to maturity and as his linguistic powers develop, and also as his thinking becomes more efficient and more adventurous.

So it is necessary, if a boy is to be properly educated, for him to learn to handle language efficiently, for all efficient language *consolidates* thought—makes it solid, firm and 'formed.' Sometimes it gives it a form that we can delight in, or on the other hand that we perceive is clumsy

or rickety. But then if it is unsatisfying to us we can take the ideas and re-express them, making them truer and more effective by fitting them out with more acceptable words. This is one of the things that the teaching of 'Composition' should train us to do. Composition in school is not only 'composing,' as the musician composes, and producing some finished work, it is practising the handling of words, learning to master them (so that they will not master us—as they do some people!). It is learning to order them, to make use of them to find out what we are thinking, to learn to persuade, to instruct, to explain, to present facts and ideas clearly and with point.

The pupil is taught composition so that the exercises and the tasks that he undertakes and the discussions that he contributes to, will gradually train him to express himself so precisely and effectively that his thinking habits too will be improved, so that he will form stable habits of thinking logically and of arriving at sound conclusions, so that his reason will not "grasp at straws for premises and float on gossamers for deductions,"¹ and so that his thoughts will obey the mastery of the words he uses, and so that their mastery will give his thoughts the clarity and fine edge that will enable them to penetrate to the heart of the problems in learning and in living that inevitably confront him.

What an exceptional opportunity for a class to receive some education is provided by the composition course! There is no school 'subject' to be worked at, no facts to be learnt and remembered, nothing to be questioned on or perhaps forgotten. There is the widest choice of topics under the sun to write about, to be discussed and enjoyed. And one of the secrets of teaching composition is so simple: the pupils themselves choose the subjects they are interested

¹ A. N. WHITEHEAD. *Adventures of Ideas*.

in and are expert in, so that they can often enjoy writing about their special interests and favourites—films, books, plays, games, pets, food, camps and expeditions. Consequently there is every possibility of their making progress in learning the craft of writing and the art of thinking ; for with freedom and willingness to write, improvement follows. All that the teacher need do at first is to stimulate his pupils to see more vividly, to probe deeper, to develop their true interests and to find more value in them.

As may be emphasized once more : in the preparation and in discussions before writing and after, the pupils' understanding and grasp of their subjects are widened and deepened, made more exact and richer. Thus there is a development in the pupils' understanding and appreciation of their own experiences and centres of interest. They do not only learn to express their ideas better, to write more freely and with more skill, they also grow wiser in understanding and more aware in appreciation of what is good, as well as quicker to see where there is failure and what is untrue. Through the discussions and the search into many and varied subjects their breadth of understanding and of interest is widened, and they find new interests and new value in things that are not new to them. So their minds, grappling with different subjects and finding words to express their thoughts on them, become more deeply engaged with a wide variety of subject. This they learn to cope with experience, to struggle with various subjects and to master them. It follows that their personalities are enriched—as they can be enriched only by deeper penetration into subjects of interest and concern to them, by finer experience and the more effective expression of it. These things—keenness in working at a subject, widening and deepening interests, a realization of progress being made—

bring confidence and a desire to persevere still more. These are the things that a teacher must work for, and must try to foster in his pupils.

And now standing still to breathe, and to look back upon the way we have passed. We seem all along to have been tuning and trying the instruments of the Muses, for a concert to be played upon them by other hands ; or to have been grating men's ears, that they may have the better music hereafter.

F. BACON. *The Advancement of Learning.*

APPENDIX A

ORAL COMPOSITION

It is a naturall, simple, and unaffected speech that I love, so written as it is spoken, and such upon the paper, as it is in the mouth, a pithie, sinnowie, full, strong, compendious and materiall speech, not so delicate and affected, as vehement and piercing.

MICHAEL LORD OF MONTAIGNE. *Essays*. Book I, Chapter XXV. Trans. John Florio in 1603.

This book does not show how oral composition is the basis of all written composition, how good oral leads naturally to the writing of English, and the better the oral, the better the written. This is a grievous omission, for it would be a fine thing if we could develop in our pupils' language some of the qualities of Roger North's language, which, Coleridge writes, ¹ "gives us the very nerve, pulse, and sinew of a hearty, healthy, conversational English"; but it was obviously better to leave the handling of spoken English to those who were capable of doing it well; and to include here only a few comments on the teaching of oral composition and some specimen syllabuses for oral work, and to leave the beginner to read the best books on the subject.

As with written composition, the essential thing for fostering good oral work is to give as much practice as possible, though this is not easy as a rule. The help that a teacher can give to further the progress in good speech of his pupils is perhaps very small, so that it is necessary

¹ *The Friend*. *A Second Landing Place*. *Essay II*.

to think out ways of improving the work. As with written, this help will be given mostly in the preparation stage : by questioning, by asking questions that will help the pupil to perceive how he can improve his work ; but often it will be the interest shown by the teacher that will initiate improvement, and that is an important enough achievement.

We should consider too the stage at which oral is most important. Clearly in the first three years of the course oral will be the chief part of the work on the mother tongue, gradually decreasing, but never omitted. After the first three years short stretches of oral in most of the lessons, not only English lessons, will give most pupils the training that they need. A few pupils will need very little practice, but the great majority in nearly all schools will need a thorough training in spoken English, especially as a reduction of real reading and the prevalent use of 'comics,' wireless and television have so seriously interfered with the free and copious use of the mother tongue out of school hours. If all teachers, especially of history, geography, science and civics would make greater use of questioning, the problem would not be so difficult.

Most of us have realized how puzzling is the problem of giving adequate practice in oral to individuals in large classes, and at the same time of keeping the body of the class interested and *working*. The waste of time occasioned in oral lessons with large classes is most unsatisfactory. This problem cannot be solved except by the use of the group method, of various devices for engaging the activities of the remainder of the class, and by the full use of 'play and make-believe' methods and projects. But it will always be necessary for the teacher to think out solutions, and to try various ways of tackling this problem : he will need skill and craftsmanship. If he does not slacken his efforts and if

he goes on trying varied procedures, some success will certainly follow.

Some of the help that a teacher can give will be forestalling, by good preparation, difficulties that prevent progress. Especially the difficulty of a pupil becoming embarrassed, tongue-tied or shy in the middle of a spoken exercise must be forestalled if possible. As is well known, confidence is essential for good public speaking, and for the inexperienced pupil the class is a critical public. We need to remember how much easier it is to speak before an audience of strangers than before fellow-workers and colleagues. So a teacher needs to be unobtrusively aware of each pupil's difficulties and reactions in speaking in front of the class. Much help can be given by thorough preparation, so that the pupil has a good command of his material ; that obviously is the most important point for poor or self-conscious speakers ; but these are often the very ones who will not study their material thoroughly enough.

Finally, we note that oral is a handier medium than writing for the expression of what we have in mind and it often needs less effort ; but it suffers from being less susceptible to criticism and improvement by the speaker, for most of it may be unpremeditated or inadequately prepared. Most of us need training so that we can speak and at the same time exercise our critical judgment on what we are saying ; and most of us need training and practice so that we can speak with confidence, therefore our pupils need this training at least just as much. To acquire the facility of speaking with fluency will be sufficient to promote the confidence of some pupils, but the true confidence that we ought to foster is that gained from a thorough knowledge of the subject and a belief that it is useful, interesting and

of some value. This point should be considered in the planning of the preparation for oral work.

Speech is an important medium of expression ; it has great influence on the growth and development of our pupils' minds and characters. It must be the duty of schools to aim at giving their pupils a command of this most potent instrument, and some awareness, at least, of its ill-usage.

A Composition Syllabus of a Middlesex Secondary School

First Year

Stories—about the 'islands' that the children have drawn, started on 'Anvil' lines¹ ; kept going for at least a term with illustrations, maps, etc.

"*In Town To-night*" Programme. Scripts written in twos, one the interviewer and the other a famous person. Useful preparation for writing dialogue for plays.

Telephone Conversations—the caller's comments given ; the class to supply the exciting news given by the friend answering the call.

Dramatization—of stories and ballads, by individuals and groups.

Episodes and Experiences—arising out of stories read in class, e.g. *Alice in Wonderland*: "You eat some of the magic mushroom on the way to school—what happens?" or 'A Midsummer Picnic with a Magician.'

¹ See *English on the Anvil* by J. N. BRITTON (JOHN MURRAY).

Collected Stories—Form collections of stories written by individuals or in groups, e.g. 'More Just So Stories,' 'Road, River and Underground' (further adventures of Toad, Rat and Mole).

Form Wall-Newspaper—containing news of the Form and School Clubs and Societies activities—sports, visits, work.

Second Year

Longer Stories : of several chapters—'The Discovery,' 'Marooned,' 'The Escape,' 'The Chase,' 'Saved by a Flash-Lamp.'

Broadcast Adaptations—of 'Treasure Island,' 'Kidnapped,' etc.

Writing a Novel—writing in groups ; outline discussed by whole class, then each group works on different chapters.

Dick Barton Programme (or other topical favourite)—groups work on different episodes for an omnibus volume.

Elizabethan Seamen and Their Voyages : the class reads Froude's *Voyages* ; groups in library or elsewhere collect information about Columbus, Cook, Hudson, etc. The stories are written up with the inclusion of extra material, but as vividly as possible.

Third Year

A 'Village' Project : each pupil takes the character of someone in the village. They describe the village and its life through the eyes of those persons, e.g. the inquisitive post-mistress, a bluff innkeeper, farmers, the Squire, etc. *Oral work* : village meetings to discuss new housing estate or drainage scheme, the villagers speaking 'in character.' A Village Information Sheet is started (for written word), and

editor with staff and the help of the village committee write up all the village and local news—sales of land, stocks, goods, market prices, social events, ploughing matches, etc.

Description: appearance of the village from a nearby hilltop, and a closer picture of the village green, with pump, skating pond, cricket pitch, yews round the churchyard, etc.

Mystery Stories: written round village life; prepared for by discussion of the way to produce a feeling of strangeness and ominousness. Comparison of effective and ineffective passages (with schoolboys' stories, Dickens, Poe, etc.). Description of village on a sunny day, and also on a wild night. Group discussion and criticism of work in progress.

'*Country Magazine*': each group selects a topic (birds, flowers, river-life, village crafts) information is collected. Other extracts can be included—poems, songs, prose purple passages.

Village Pageant: groups work on different episodes in the history of the village—Ancient Britons, the building of the Norman Church, Queen Elizabeth makes a progress, the Roundheads storm the Manorhouse, an eighteenth century election, the Industrial Revolution influences the village, September, 1914 and 1939, the Village of the Future.

Citizens' Advice Bureau: how the villagers accept this new thing; they seek advice 'in character' on rationing, licences for buildings of different sorts, information about the 'call-up,' lost registration cards, newcomers to the village, rents and taxes.

Fourth Year

The Local Social Club: goes to the seaside—twenty characters, each with an understudy, are suggested and

decided upon (a more subtle assessment of characters now). Characters are brought out by scenes in a cafeteria, queueing for a bus, and details of different behaviour in other everyday situations. Scenes in a boarding house, other visitors as seen by the club.

A Film Company visits the seaside ; descriptions of long shots and 'close-ups.' Sound effects. Discussion of effective film-openings. Outline the story for the filmers.

APPENDIX B

A SPECIMEN SYLLABUS FOR WRITTEN COMPOSITION

An example of a syllabus might be useful. This, however, is a theoretical one ; it is based on the suggestions contained in this book, and shows how the various tasks and exercises can be fitted into a five years' course. It is merely tentative and shows only roughly the various stages in which the different tasks might be attempted. It would be impossible to show exactly what the work of each form should be, because so much depends on the abilities and maturity of the pupils ; and also because many of the exercises allotted to a junior form might be carried out on more difficult subjects and in a more ambitious way with a much more senior form. Furthermore, almost any one exercise might be just as suitable for the form above the one given here or the form below, according to the previous work that had been done and to the progress made. This syllabus therefore can be taken only as a general guide.

Syllabus One

Form I. General Aims.—Interest in writing, Fluency, Ease and Copiousness.

Reproduction—anecdotes, fables, short stories.

Picture Paragraphs—describing, or telling a story about a picture.

Story-Telling—Stories continued after the book ends, e.g. 'How Ben Gunn found the treasure.'

Production—Newsheets, Wall-newspapers, Form Diaries and Bulletins.

Letter-Writing—expressing thanks and requests to relatives.

Form II. General Aims.—Variety, Vividness and Invention.

Story-Writing—camp-fire stories, Travellers' Tales, Just So Stories.

Play-Writing—dramatizing stories (folk, adventure, historical, etc.).

Character Sketches—'Meetings,' 'Points of View,' etc.

Description—Characters, Scenes, Action.

Description—Lost Property Office, Descriptive Catalogues (School Museums, etc.), Descriptive Dictionary of aircraft, railway engines, fish—fresh-water.

Diaries—of a plumber, engine-driver, mountaineering guide, deep-sea diver, lighthouse keeper.

Project—'Our Village,' 'Local Life,' 'Town Development.'

Production—Form magazines, anthologies, other compilations.

Letter-Writing—asking for information, apologizing for damage done (windows, fences, apple-trees, etc. !)

Form III. General Aims.—Precision and Richness.

Description—'Historical Portraits,' 'My Favourites,' 'A Local Guide Book.'

Descriptive Sketches—'A Busy Railway Station.'

Character Sketches—'A C.I.D. Dossier.' 'Friends and Relations.'

Compilations—'A How-to-do-it Volume' and 'A How-to-make-it.'

The Right Word—How to make a story vivid.

Interviews and Impersonations—character and dialogue.

Production—English in Civic Life : telephoning, voting, electioneering.

Letter-Writing—acceptances, apologies and refusals.

Form IV. General Aims.—Effectiveness and Variety of Form and Purpose.

Reports and Accounts—'The Collected Papers of the X Society.'

Character Sketches—'My Likes and Dislikes,' 'An Employment Agency,' 'At the Local Food Office,' 'Customers I have known,' 'Waiting to be interviewed.'

Description—'A Shopping Queue,' 'A Village Concert,' 'A Fair Ground.'

Diaries—Historical and Literary.

Definitions, and Criticisms of them—knitting, a spiral, clouds.

Explanation—Model making, Toy making, Household Hints, Recipes for Home and Camp, Dressmaking, Soldering.

Letter-Writing—ordering goods, instructing repairs to be done, advertising sales, asking for information.

Form V. General Aims.—Mastery of 'Form' and the Organization of Thought.

Arrangement—openings and endings, logical order, balance and proportion.

Unity and Relevance—varying with varying subjects.

Explicit Continuity—of action, of thought.

Propriety—of fact and diction.

Argument—stating a case, developing a theme, reasoning.

Points of View—objective, subjective, narrative by a participant, by an eye-witness, reported incident with bias, and without.

Persuasion—to join a club, to alter a decision, to support a proposal.

*, Exposition—of a theory, of a policy, of a point of philosophy.

Symposiums—the cinema and film making, the theatre and acting, the Press, House-Keeping—groups dealing with different aspects.

Description—Critical: is the passage informative or descriptive? Is the character presented through description or revelation by action and speech?

APPENDIX C

An Example of a Form Compilation

A Book of Doing and Making

(Made by the boys of a Grammar School, Form IVA, during
the school year 1949-50)

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By the same author

TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

The teaching of grammar in secondary schools has been the subject of much debate. Problems of what grammar to teach in school courses, how to teach it, its purpose and value are discussed in this book. The inadequacy of the 'old-style' grammar teaching with its parsing and column analysis is explained carefully ; and some of the so-called definitions that are to be found in school textbooks are examined critically. The failure of many of these definitions to contribute to pupils' understanding of their own language is pointed out, with numerous examples.

The last four chapters contain suggestions for teaching grammar in a way that will help secondary school pupils to become precisely aware of the meaning of what they read and more exact in their use of language. The first part of the book is therefore exploratory and critical, and the last part positive and practical. Dr Gurrey deals with some of the examples in the last section in full detail in order to show how the method may be applied. The main point of this method is the linking-up of the study of grammar and comprehension and the exact study of the meaning. Grammatical studies should not be carried out in isolation, but worked into the examination and the expression of meaning. Grammar, the author asserts, is an integral part of language and not a separate 'subject'.

The appendices include brief studies of such controversial topics as 'Grammar and Logic', 'Thinking without Language', 'Pure Grammar' and the new 'Structural Analysis'.